



ESC Insight's Unofficial Guide to The Eurovision Song Contest 2012

www.escinsight.com



Table of Contents

Editors Introduction.....	4
Albania.....	5
Austria.....	7
Azerbaijan.....	10
Belarus.....	12
Belgium.....	14
Bosnia & Herzegovina.....	16
Bulgaria.....	18
Croatia.....	20
Cyprus.....	22
Denmark.....	24
Estonia.....	26
FYR Macedonia.....	28
Finland.....	30
France.....	32
Georgia.....	34
Germany.....	36
Greece.....	38
Hungary.....	40
Iceland.....	42
Ireland.....	44
Israel.....	46
Italy.....	48
Latvia.....	50
Lithuania.....	52
Malta.....	54
Moldova.....	56
Montenegro.....	58
Norway.....	60
Portugal.....	62
Romania.....	64
Russia.....	66
San Marino.....	68
Serbia.....	70
Slovakia.....	72
Slovenia.....	74
Spain.....	76

Sweden.....	78
Switzerland.....	80
The Netherlands.....	82
Turkey.....	84
Ukraine.....	86
United Kingdom.....	88

Editors Introduction

Ewan's Word

Let's be honest, the Eurovision Song Contest is inherently political. It was set up by Marcel Bezencon in post-war Europe to bring people and countries together, and to share the culture of the wounded nation of Europe, all though the power of music.

As the Eurovision Song Contest arrives in the east and the Land of Fire, that word - politics - takes on many meanings for many people. The media buzz around the Contest has touched on many issues that aren't directly related to the music. In all of this, the ideals of the Contest, to bring nations together and to understand each other, are still on show, even if they are more subtle than some organisations would like.

Now it's all about the music. After almost eight hundred songs reaching the final stages of the various National Finals and judging panels, we have our forty two songs. They'll take to the stage in the brand new Crystal Arena, and forty one will have their dreams dashed.

May Sweden the best song win.

Sharleen's word...

For me personally, 2012 one of the strongest years in terms of competition we have seen at Eurovision.

As we sit here in the early stages of rehearsal at the contest, we have yet to see a 'car crash'; the level of both staging and vocals is high. Its going to be a toughly fought final, and I don't feel this is the year that we will have one serious contender – its going to be far closer than that.

Most of all, when it comes to a few months down the track, we will look back at 2012 and we'll all agree that this year gives us more variety than previously. Something for everyone. Not only that we'll still be listening again to a great majority of the songs for a long time to come.

Hello Europe! Let the Eurovision Song Contest begin!

Special thanks to...

Very special thanks once again go to our friend and creative genius Ben Morris for his wonderful minipop illustrations utilized in the guide.

Albania



AL 2012

At a Glance

Song: Suus
Artist: Rona Nishliu
Composer: Florent Boshnjaku
Lyricist: Rona Nishliu
Performing: Semi 1, 5th

About the Artist

Rona Nishliu became known for her appearance in the talent show "Ethet & Krasta Show" which was held in Tirana during 2004. She first took part in Festivali i Këngës in 2004 together with Teuta Kurti and Vesa Luma, and the trio was awarded the first junior prize.

Even though Rona Nishliu is known for being a pop singer in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro, she is actually a devoted experimental jazz musician, too. Her interpretation is characterized with nuances of soul music influences as well. Her vocal range and interpretative power are her strongest points.

Albania in Eurovision

Appearances: 8
Debut: 2004
Victory: -
Best: 7th 2004: The Image of You, by Anjeza Shahini, with 106 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010.

Recent History

- 2011: Kenga Ime, by Aurela Gace, 14th in the semi with 57 points.
- 2010: It's All About You, by Juliana Pasha, 16th with 62 points.
- 2009: Carry Me In Your Dreams, by Kejsa Tola, 17th with 48 points.

2012 National Final

Determined in late December 2011, the 50th anniversary of Festival i Këngës was once again used to choose this year's Eurovision participant. Hosted over 4 nights, 28 participants over 2 semi finals were whittled down to 20 acts for the final. Rona won convincingly, 22 points (a total of 77) clear of her rival Elton Deda.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

The girl can sing, there is no question over that. But the first appearance of latin at Eurovision, with a key change in the middle of one of the longest sustained phrase of the Contest, with a fantastically futuristic haircut... a worthy song but one that is not going to get any public sentiment on the night.

Samantha says...

This is truly a standout song, but whether that's a positive or a negative is completely up for debate. In all of my years following Eurovision, I've never seen such a divisive reaction to an entry! Rona's got an undoubtedly powerful instrument, and a flair for the melodramatic that works wonders for this emotional number, but her live performances have had the tendency to go a bit off-key. If she is able to rein in that wild mustang of a voice, this might be a shock qualifier.

Sharleen says...

Rona channels the likes of Bjork with her voice – an instrument that has a great range but also still appears to be raw and at times, quite abrasive. Certainly, Suus is a song that will divide people as much as her talent. I steer towards the negative on this one. Keeping it in the native language with such an emotive song doesn't do her any favours either.

Your Notes

Austria



At a Glance

Song: Woki Mit Deim Popo
Artist: Trackshittaz
Composer: Lukas Plöchl
Lyricist: Lukas Plöchl
Performing: Semi 1, 16th

About the Artist

Trackshittaz consists of Lukas Plöchl alias “G-Neila” and Manuel Hoffelner alias “Manix”. Hailing from the Austrian Mühlviertel district, they define themselves as “tractor gangster party rap”. The duo first became known for their YouTube hit Alloa bam Fraunz, based on the house track Alors On Danse and Lukas Plöchl’s participation in the ORF casting show Helden von Morgen.

The duo have had major success in their country, with their début Oidaah pumpn muas’s (platinum status), which appeared early in 2011, and their following hit Prolettn feian lãngaah (gold status). Both albums have reached no. 1 in the albums chart, and their run of success continued in February 2012 with their third album Zruck zu de Ruabm (gold status).

In 2011, they competed in their national final for Eurovision, reaching 2nd place and losing out to Nadine Beiler.

Austria in Eurovision

Appearances: 44
Debut: 1957
Victory: 1 (1966)
Best : 1st, 1966: Merci Cherie, by Udo Jurgens, with 31 points
Semi Finals: Automatically qualified to final in 2004, but missed out in 2005 and 2007.
Withdrew from 2008. Returned in 2011, where they qualified to the final.

Recent History

- 2011: The Secret is Love, by Nadine Beiler, 18th with 64 points.
- 2007: Get a Life Get Alive, by Eric Papilaya, 27th with 4 points.

2012 National Final

Following on from the success of the 2011 national finals, broadcaster ORF announced in late November 2011 nine acts that qualified directly for the national final, which then took place on 24 February 2012. The line-up of ten finalists was completed through an open call for songs. On 9 January 2012, ORF announced that Mary Broadcast Band had been selected as the tenth act in the final.

Trackshittaz were the hot favourites alongside drag act Conchite Wurst, and sure enough both made it to the superfinal of the national contest. In the final stage of voting, Trackshittaz won with 51% of the public vote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Has to be seen live. The preview videos highlight the jokey lyrics, but the Trackshittaz are proven experts in infecting an audience with their energy. You won't help but fall in love with this one, but only when you see them on stage come the semi finals. And perhaps the grand final as well.

Samantha says...

Love it or hate it, this song is pure fun! What it lacks in musicality, it makes up for in entertainment value. It might not have been as strong of an entry as "Oida Taunz!" from last year's National Final, sometimes you need a bit of levity and booty-shaking in life, don't you think?

Sharleen says...

The boys from Austria ooze fun. They will be the kings of the party, the show-offs, and even though they will not be to everyone's tastes they will most certainly be remembered when it comes to the important time to vote. I expect in a lackluster semi they will sail through to the final, but in the end, the joke may wear thin and find themselves hovering towards the bottom of the table.

Your Notes

Azerbaijan



AZ 2012

At a Glance

Song: When The Music Dies
Artist: Sabina Babayeva
Composer: Anders Bagge, Johan Kronlund, Sandra Bjurman, Stefan Örn
Lyricist: Anders Bagge, Sandra Bjurman, Stefan Örn, Johan Kronlund
Performing: Auto-qualify Final, 13th

About the Artist

Born in 1979 in Baku, Sabina Babayeva is a seasoned jazz performer. She graduated from the Asaf Zeynally College of Music with a degree in vocal arts, and since then has participated in many song competitions both in her country and abroad.

Her first big victory was in 2009 when she won the grand prix at the young performers contest Amberstar in Latvia.

She has also found success at many other festivals, including Baku song contest The Wave in 1999. She performs in theatre and has played Fler de Lis in the Azerbaijani version of the world famous musical Notre Dame De Paris.

Azerbaijan in Eurovision

Appearances: 4
Debut: 2008
Victory: 1 (2011)
Best: 1st 2011 : Winner with 221 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011.

Recent History

- 2011: Running Scared, by Eldar and Nigar, 1st with 221 points
- 2010: Drip Drop, by Safura, 5th with 145 points
- 2009: Always, by AySel & Arash, 3rd with 207 points
- 2008: Day After Day, by Elnur & Samir, 8th with 132 points

2012 National Final

Utilising the same method as 2011 to select its singer via a series of semi finals, İctimai chose 72 hopefuls to participate in the process.

From late November to mid February, the singers were whittled down to just 5 finalists.

On 12 February, the jury selected Sabina Babayeva, a repeated participant at their national selection process to represent Azerbaijan in Eurovision 2012

The song was internally selected amongst 119 songs, and once again the song has been written by Swedish writers.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Returning to form by sending a younger woman who has to carry the weight of a nation on her shoulders, I have to wonder if Azerbaijan want to win the contest again, or just submit a successful failure. Guaranteed a cracking reception on the night, there's a lot of style on show here, but I wonder if Babayeva will push a little to hard and take the song from diva to disappointing

Samantha says...

Following their nearly-constant trend, Azerbaijan's gone Swedish again. At the very least, they've injected their song with a touch of traditional instrumentation and a bit of mugham tucked into the backing vocal. Sabina's got a better voice than Nikki, and while the lyrics can get a bit repetitive at times, the song as a whole is generally stronger than "Running Scared". While there are stronger songs in this competition, I don't think that an Azeri repeat is completely out of the question...

Sharleen says...

If this was the song that took us to Baku last year, I would have absolutely understood the voters thinking. This power ballad hits the mark lyrically, and as we've now seen from Eurovision in Concert, Sabina performs it with ease and conviction. I think the song is extremely underrated in its potential – a top 10 most certainly, but disadvantaged from performing in the 13th spot at the final means its unlikely that Azerbaijan will be doing a double.

Your Notes

Belarus



BY 2012

At a Glance

Song: We Are The Heroes
Artist: Litesound
Composer: Dmitry Kariakin, Vladimir Kariakin
Lyricist: Dmitry Kariakin, Vladimir Kariakin

About the Artist

Litesound are one of the most successful bands in Belarus, mixing music from several genres and styles from classical rock to pop music. They have twice received the Song of the Year award, and one of their biggest hits, The Life, was awarded Ringtone of the Year at the 2008 CTV Channel Music Awards.

Litesound was founded by the Kariakin brothers Dmitry and Vladimir. Nowadays the band has become an international project after the Italian musician and singer Jacopo Massa joined. With the Russian guitarist Alex Kolchin and Belarusian drummer Ignat Yakovich the band played more than 130 gigs last year.

Litesound took part in four EuroFest projects taking the second prize twice and reaching the finals in 2008 and 2009.

Belarus in Eurovision

Appearances: 8
Debut: 2004
Victory: -
Best: 6th, - 2007: Work Your Magic, by Dmitry Koldun, 145 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2007, 2010.

Recent History

- 2011: I Love Belarus, by Anastasiya Vinnikova, 14th in the semi with 45 points
- 2010: Butterflies, by 3+2, 24th place with 18 points
- 2009: Eyes that Never Lie, by Petr Elfimov, 13th in the semi with 25 points
- 2008: Hasta La Vista, by Ruslan Alekhno, 17th in the semi with 27 points

2012 National Final

On 18 October 2011, BTRC started the call for songs for their national selection Eurofest 2012. At the start of December, the jury chose 15 entries to be presented in a national semi-final, with five entries then advancing to the final. Following a final that Litesound clearly won on both 50% televote and 50% jury vote, the winner was shockingly announced as Alyona Lanskaya.

On February 24, 2012, the Belorussian President conducted an investigation leading to Lanskaya's "unfair" win in Eurofest 10 days earlier. The president ordered an immediate investigation and was later confirmed to be true. Therefore, Alyona Lanskaya was disqualified and instead Litesound, who got second place in Eurofest, were internally chosen as the new representatives of Belarus in the Eurovision Song Contest 2012 in Baku.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

As a rock number, I would have said Belarus were onto a winner. But Litesound haven't had the faith to stick with their sound and succumb to a rather poor dance mix of what was a nice little guitar/indie number. If you don't believe in it yourself, why should we cast a vote for you?

Samantha says...

I'm glad to see Litesound's made it to the big dance after so years of trying and falling at the National Final level. Politics and allegations of corruption aside, switching from Alyona Lanskaya to Litesound was probably the best upgrade that Belarus could have made this year. While I'm really not as huge of a fan of the more electronic-tinged arrangement (I preferred the original rock sound), I still maintain that this might be Belarus's best entry since "Work Your Magic" back in 2007, and it might just make it past the Semis.

Sharleen says...

Easily the best choice of the Belorussian final, Litesound deserve their moment in the spotlight in 2012. This is the first time that I felt a Belarus entry would qualify for the final since the wonderful Koldun in 2007. The shameful thing is that the strong rock performance we saw impress at the national contest stage has been replaced with an rather bland electronica sound, which I think will highly diminish Belarus' long overdue chance at a good result.

Your Notes

Belgium



BE 2012

At a Glance

Song: Would You
Artist: Iris
Composer: Nina Sampermans, Jean Bosco Safari, Walter Mannaerts
Lyricist: Nina Sampermans, Jean Bosco Safari, Walter Mannaerts

About the Artist

17 year old Iris has been performing music since an early age, singing a few local gigs until being spotted in 2010 at a talent competition, jointly organised by Flemish teen magazine Joepie and Sonic Angel (the record company behind Tom Dice). Iris was offered a record deal and soon afterwards released her first hit single Wonderful. When the VRT (the Flemish public broadcaster) announced that Iris would be representing Belgium at the Eurovision Song Contest in Baku, she was still relatively inexperienced and had never before appeared on national TV. The VRT was won over by her youthful enthusiasm, fresh look and intriguing performance.

Belgium in Eurovision

Appearances: 53
Debut: 1956
Victory: 1 (1986)
Best: 1st, 1986: J'aime La Vie, by Sandra Kim, with 176 points
Semi Finals: Auto-qualified in 2004, and qualified in 2010. Did not qualify between 2005-2009 or 2011

Recent History

- 2011: With Love, by Witloof Bay, 11th place in the semi with 53 points
- 2010: Me and My Guitar, by Tom Dice, 6th place with 143 points
- 2009: Copycat, by Patrick Ouchene, 17th place in the semi with 1 point
- 2008: O Julissi, by Ishtar, 17th place in the semi with 16 points

2012 National Final

The Flemish broadcaster VRT again chose an artist to represent the country in the 2012 contest internally. On 18 November 2011, it was announced that Iris will represent the country in the 2012 contest. On 17 March 2012, Eurosong 2012: een song voor Iris took place. In the show, Iris sang two possible entries for the Eurovision Song Contest, Safety Net and Would You. The winning song was chosen by televoting. Later that night, the results were announced during the Flemish talkshow Vrienden Van de Veire, with Would You winning with 53% of the vote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Dear Tom Dice's record label, please send us someone a bit like Tom, but a bit different. PS don't bother sending us any decent songs for whatever wonderful little voice you send us, we've got some smashing ideas on what the public want. Well, the Belgian public, not sure about the rest of Europe.

Samantha says...

While many have compared Iris to her Flemish countryman (and labelmate) Tom Dice, it seems that "Would You" lacks the genuine nature of Belgium's 2010 entry. While she sings it generally well, and comes across as sweet (albeit a bit young, which, frankly, she is), the song doesn't have anything to it that would help it hook into a listener's mind. I wish her all the best in her growing career, but I'm not sure if she'll get the recognition or votes she'll need on the night of her Semi.

Sharleen says...

After having high hopes following the early announcement of Belgium's entrant, and the factor of having the same people as Tom Dice on board to prepare the song, Belgium has once again let the side down. There is no doubt that Iris can sing, but the songs chosen for her in no way shows her talent and her performance is hindered by the factor she seems to not connect with the lyrics. A smile and jigging have no place in this bittersweet love song, and this song has no place in the final.

Your Notes

Bosnia & Herzegovina



At a Glance

Song: Korake Ti Iznam
Artist: Maya Sar
Composer: Maja Sarihodžić
Lyricist: Maja Sarihodžić

About the Artist

As a songwriter, composer and singer, Sar works with some of the biggest names from the Balkan region. For many years she has been a member of Dino Merlin's band, with whom she performed on stage at the 2011 Eurovision Song Contest in Düsseldorf.

With her single Nespretno, Sar achieved remarkable success and gained much recognition from the public. She composes for other artists with her producer husband Mahir Sarihodžić and is also finishing her first solo album.

Bosnia & Herzegovina in Eurovision

Appearances: 17
Debut: 1993
Victory: -
Best: 3rd, 2006: Lejla, by Hari Mata Hari, with 229 points
Semi Finals: Qualified every year 2004-2011

Recent History

- 2011: Love in Rewind, by Dino Merlin, 6th with 127 points
- 2010: Thunder and Lightning, by Vukasin Brajic, 17th with 51 points
- 2009: Bistra Voda, by Regina, 9th with 106 points
- 2008: Pokasaj, by Laka, 10th with 110 points

2012 National Final

Both the song and artist was internally selected, with the announcement occurring on 15th December and the song presentation on 15th February.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

If this song wasn't one of the Balkan countries, I doubt it would be rated as high as fans have it in the run up to Baku. It doesn't stand out, there's no fire in Maya Sar's staging, and even the video struggles to frame the song in anything other than a decommissioned rocket factory building pianos. And like the factory output, the song never takes off.

Samantha says...

Maya's got an absolutely lovely voice in this sweet, sweeping ballad, but it took me about four listens for me to remember it without being fed the first few notes. On the night of her Semi, Maya has to be able to overcome that. Hopefully, her late draw in a night full of linguistic and cultural neighbors will push "Korake ti znam" into the Final, since this is really a little gem in my eyes.

Sharleen says...

Over the past few years, Bosnia hasn't put a foot wrong in its entries. Maya Sar is an extremely engaging and capable performer, but the song itself for me lacks the instantly memorable hooks of their previous entries. On the plus side, it's in a semi that is packed full of its neighbors that will vote for it. On the negative, there are far better and memorable ballads alongside it. The key here as to how high it goes at the final stage is how much Maya Sar can engage the camera and viewers' imaginations alike to vote.

Your Notes

Bulgaria



BG 2012

At a Glance

Song: Love Unlimited
Artist: Sofi Marinova
Composer: Krum Geopriev & Iasen Kozhev
Lyricist: Donka Vasileva

About the Artist

Thirty-six-year-old Marinova is one of Bulgaria's most popular performers. Devoted to the arts since childhood, she excelled at school in Etropole and impressed musicians from local bands with her beautiful voice. Soon after, she started singing covers at weddings and christenings; pop hits were part of her repertoire as well as gypsy songs from her cultural heritage.

After victories at several music festivals, she released her first album, *Old Wounds*, with band Super Express which is one of the best-selling albums in the country. Several solo albums followed until 2004 when she began working with Sunny and producer Krum Krumov.

In 2005, she reached second place at the national selection for Eurovision in Bulgaria with *Edinstveni* (Only One) with Slavi Trifonov. In 2007, she performed the song *Ya Tvoya* (I'm Yours) with rapper, Ustata and placed third. Now Marinova embraces the challenge of competing in the Eurovision Song Contest for the first time.

Bulgaria in Eurovision

Appearances: 7
Debut: 2005
Victory: -
Best: 5th, 2007: *Water*, by Elitsa Todorova and Stoyan Yankoulov, with 157 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2007

Recent History

- 2011: *Na Inat*, by Poli Genova, 12th in the semi with 48 points
- 2010: *Angel Si Ti*, by Miro, 15th in the semi with 19 points
- 2009: *Illusion*, by Krassimir Avramov, 16th in the semi with 7 points
- 2008: *DJ Take Me Away*, by Deep Zone and Balthazar, 11th in the semi with 56 points

2012 National Final

On 25 August 2011, BNT started the call for songs for their national selection which will be once again supervised by a special panel consisting of music and media professionals. On 15 November 2011, BNT announced the 33 songs which advanced to the Academy selection on 23 November 2011. On 14th January 22 entries competed for the final 12 spots. Whilst tied in regards to points with *New 5* on 20 points, Marinova was declared the winner with 12 points from the televote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

At least it makes Albania sound less shouty and more lyrical. Anything else? Bueller? Bueller?

Samantha says...

This, for me, is being filed into the category of “Euroclub hit, but Eurovision miss”. I’m not normally a fan of songs incorporating a half-dozen arbitrary languages into its lyrics, as it feels like blatant pandering to the voting audience across the Continent. (Romania 2007, anybody?) Sofi’s range is impressive, but it can get a bit shrill in the upper registers, and I hope she can consistently hit those notes live, or else this has the potential to go right off the rails. It very well might appeal to those Eurofans who have a soft spot in their hearts for danceable, ethno-tinged pop, though.

Sharleen says...

In the past Eurovision has been accused of being dated in its music. 2012 could have been the year to be rid of this horrid tag, if not for this song. Love Unlimited reeks of 1989s’ Italo housemusic phase – a source of annoyance for 90% of the population back in the day, and in no way requires any renaissance. Sofi can sing, but her range would be far better suited to a tamer slower song. Shamefully for Bulgaria, once again their entry will going down in flames in the semi-final stages.

Your Notes

Croatia



HR 2012

At a Glance

Song: Nebo
Artist: Nina Badric
Composer: Nina Badric
Lyricist: Nina Badric

About the Artist

Badrić is one of the most successful Croatian musicians, whose career has spanned over 20 years. Popularity has followed this musician beyond Croatian borders, where she has been dubbed the best pop singer from the former Yugoslavian region by both audiences and music professionals.

In the 1990s, Badrić commenced a solo singing career, topping music charts all over Croatia. She is a multiple winner of the Popularity Oscar, awarded by professionals and audiences in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia.

Croatia in Eurovision

Appearances: 19
Debut: 1993
Victory: -
Best: 4th, 1996: Sveta Ljubav, by Maja Blagdan, with 98 points
1999: Marija Magdalena, by Doris Dragovic, with 118 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2005, 2006 (auto qualification), 2008, 2009 (through jury vote/save).

Recent History

- 2011: Celebrate, by Daria Kinzer, 15th in the semi with 41 points
- 2010: Lako Je Sve, by Feminem, 13th in the semi with 33 points
- 2009: Ljepa Tena, by Igor Curkov feat. Andrea, 18th with 45 points
- 2008: Romanca, by Kraljevi Ulice feat. 75 cents, 21st with 44 points

2012 National Final

Nina was internally selected after the selection process Dora was cancelled due to lack of interest. The song was unveiled on 24th February.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Nina Badric, after an internal selection, finally gets to Eurovision, with a song that has been through more different arrangements since it was announced than Johnny Logan has had hot dinners. When you have a good song, the arrangement is obvious... and that means the constant tweaking says more about the song than anything else.

Samantha says...

Like so many of the nations in the region, Croatia has reached for a veteran performer who is well known throughout the Balkans. Nina's got a great voice, but the recent revamp in the song's arrangement doesn't seem to do it justice. It lost a bit of its impact when it went for a softer, more subtle instrumentation. That being said, "Nebo" is a much stronger song than what Croatia's brought us in recent years.

Sharleen says...

When you have a region such as the Balkans all producing rather strong entries in the same year, you'll always have one that gets lost in the crowd. Sadly, after a rather long period of average results for Croatia, Nina Badric is not going to take them out of the bad spell. She'll perform it well on the night at the semi, but with a bland final arrangement that lacks a 'moment', the voters will struggle to remember it come voting time.

Your Notes

Cyprus



At a Glance

Song: La La Love
Artist: Ivi Adamou
Composer: Alex Papaconstantinou, Bjorn Djupström, Alexandra Zakka & Viktor Svensson
Lyricist: Alex Papaconstantinou, Bjorn Djupström, Alexandra Zakka & Viktor Svensson

About the Artist

Eighteen-year-old Adamou started her career at 16 emerging from X Factor 2 in Greece, where she got the opportunity to expose her vocal potential and her powerful character.

Soon after the show she released her debut gold album Kalokeri Stin Kardia and the first single A*G*A*P*I. Two more hit singles followed, Sose Me and To Mistiko Mou Na Vreis. She also had the number one summer hit of the year 2010 with her guest performance in the song San Erthi I Mera, by the most popular Greek hip-hop act, Stavento.

Cyprus in Eurovision

Appearances: 29
Debut: 1981
Victory: -
Best: 5th, 1982: Mono I Agapi by Anna Vissi, with 85 points
1997: Mana Mou by Hara & Andreas Constantinou, with 98 points
2004: Stronger Every Minute by Lisa Andreas, with 170 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004, 2005, 2010

Recent History

- 2011: San Aggelos S'Agapisa, by Christos Mylordas, 16th in the semi with 18 points
- 2010: Life Looks Better in Spring by Jon Lilygreen and The Islanders, 21st with 27 points
- 2009: Firefly by Christina Mextaxa, 14th in the semi with 32 points
- 2008: Femme Fatale by Evdokia Kadí, 15th in the semi with 36 points

2012 National Final

On 3 August 2011, it was revealed that Ivi Adamou would represent Cyprus in the Eurovision Song Contest 2012. On 27 December 2011, the names of the three entries were revealed. The songs were released on 6 January 2012 – Call the Police, La La Love, and You Don't Belong Here. La La Love won both the televote and jury, with a full 24 points.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

We've not heard this live. Last year there was a delightful dance-floor filler with a cheeky chorus (Getter Jaani's Rockefeller Street) that everyone ranked very well. But without the help of a studio and some vox effects, it fell flat in Dusseldorf. For Getter Jaani read Ivi Adamou.

Samantha says...

Like Malta, "La La Love" gets my "Cotton Candy Award" for this year. It's sweet, light, and fluffy, and it makes you happy when you're around it, but it lacks substance and evaporates completely once you've enjoyed it. They haven't scored well with an uptempo song in almost a decade, but with Greece in the same Semi, and being performed after San Marino's train-wreck and before Denmark's midtempo campfire song, this might appeal to fans looking for a bit of Cypriot sunlight. Or it could completely face-plant, á la Armenia 2011.

Sharleen says...

There is always one – the song that is ridiculous catchy, everyone loves, but when we see at rehearsals suddenly becomes a car crash. I've been saying all along that Ivi's ability to perform a song that relies heavily on electronic elements was untested live and thus didn't stand much hope. Now over the past week I finally can report that the poppy radio tune is indeed a flat, off-pitch and lifeless performance from Ivi when live. The song may be highly rated now by fans, but watch it drop to a possible non-qualifier soon enough.

Your Notes

Denmark



DK 2012

At a Glance

Song: Should've Known Better
Artist: Soluna Samay
Composer: Chief 1 & Remee
Lyricist: Chief 1, Remee & Isam B

About the Artist

Samay was first discovered by record producers Remée and Chief 1 who were looking for a solo singer to perform at the Danish Melodi Grand Prix 2012. The 21-year-old singer/songwriter had been busking since the age of six, playing the drums, double bass and guitar.

Denmark in Eurovision

Appearances: 40
Debut: 1957
Victory: 1963: Dansevise by Grethe and Jørgen Ingmann, with 42 points
2000: Fly on the Wings of Love by The Olsen Brothers, with 195 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified 205, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011

Recent History

- 2011: A New Tomorrow, by A Friend in London, 5th with 134 points
- 2010: In a Moment Like This by Chaneë and N'evergreen, 4th with 149 points
- 2009: Believe Again by Niels Brinck, 13th with 74 points
- 2008: All Night Long by Simon Mathew, 15th with 60 points

2012 National Final

A line-up of 10 acts was announced on 5 January 2012. However, one of the selected finalist songs ("Nowhere" by Valen:tine) was disqualified after it was released before the date allowed by the European Broadcasting Union and thus breaking the rules. The song was not replaced. The winning was chosen in two rounds of voting. In the first round, viewers and a Danish professional jury select the top 3 songs. The winner was then chosen among those three songs by the viewers, the Danish jury and four international professional juries, representing Azerbaijan, Germany, Norway and Russia. In both voting rounds, the viewers' votes accounted for 50% of the total score, while jury votes accounted for the rest. Soluna won 110 points in the superfinal of 3 artists.

i

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Yikes. The MGP performance was a mess, like handing six primary school kids a big box of dressing up clothes and asked them to put on a show for the rest of the class. Couple that with a song that lacks ambition to do anything other than fill three minutes of your life, and you might have your 'shock' non-qualifier. Yet the Danes think this is a winner... Hmmmm.

Samantha says...

I think this is capably performed by a singer whose abilities go much deeper than three minutes will allow to show. Soluna's been a street busker since the age of twelve, and viewers shouldn't assume that just because she's young, cute, and singing a pop song, that she's a one-trick pony. Denmark has consistently scored well with poorer songs, so if the staging treats her well, I'd expect a similar, Top-Ten result.

Sharleen says...

Denmark is the king of the toe-tapper song. It started with the Olsens in 2000, and they have been flogging the format for a number of years with reasonable success. This is no different. Soluna performs on stage with ease, and I am a fan of the staging as well as her live vocal abilities. Ireland will once again lap it up, and the rest of Western Europe will follow. It screams for radio potential, as well a top 8 final result for Soluna, if not higher.

Your Notes

Estonia



EE 2012

At a Glance

Song: Kuula
Artist: Ott Lepland
Composer: Ott Lepland
Lyricist: Aapo Ilves

About the Artist

In Estonia, Ott Lepland has won everything that could be won: Estonian Idol in 2009, the lead role in High School Musical in 2010, the show Laulupealinn (Singing Capital) in 2011, and Eesti Laul, the Estonian national selection of the Eurovision Song Contest, in 2012 with his own composition Kuula.

Estonia in Eurovision

Appearances: 17
Debut: 1994
Victory: 1, 2001: Everybody by Tanel Padar Dave Benton & 2XL, with 198 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2009, 2011.

Recent History

- 2011: Rockerfeller Street, by Getter Jaani, 24th with 44 points
- 2010: Siren by Malcolm Lincoln, 14th in the semi with 39 points
- 2009: Randajad by Urban Symphony, 6th with 129 points
- 2008: Leto Svet by Kreisiraadio, 18th in the semi with 8 points

2012 National Final

The submissions period opened in 12 December 2011 with an internal jury appointed by ERR selecting 20 songs to proceed. The semi-finals held on 18 and 25 February 2012 selected 10 finalists for Eesti Laul 2012 on 3 March 2012 at the Nokia Concert Hall in Tallinn. The superfinal of 2 artists gave us Ott Lepland and Lenna, with Ott eventually announced as the winner.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It's actually a very nice song. Whether Europe gets it or not is another matter. Lepland sings his heart out, and even in a Estonian the emotion does come through in the words and in his body. A little dark horse of a song, who's simplicity might be enough to stand out.

Samantha says...

Possibly the strongest male vocal of this year's competition, and I think Ott made the right choice by staying in Estonian. Some might decry the song for being "boring", but I think the dramatic key-change and his genuine connection with the lyrics make this a powerful entry that I think some might underestimate.

Sharleen says...

Unlike many fans, I don't believe the fact this song in Estonian is of detriment to its chances – just think back to Urban Symphonys' performance in 2009 and their result. This song transcends boundries of language, and Lepland is arguably the best male voice on this years stage. Ott's ability to demonstrate the passion of Kuula on stage will be the biggest test if it can escape the semi. My feeling is that it can, and once past that hurdle could prove to be a dark horse on the final stage for a left-hand table result.

Your Notes

FYR Macedonia



MK 2012

At a Glance

Song: Crno E Belo
Artist: Kaliopi
Composer: Romeo Grill
Lyricist: Kaliopi

About the Artist

Kaliopi is the biggest pop star in FYR Macedonia, an exceptionally famous singer, composer, poet and is also renowned for her humanitarian work.

Kaliopi has recorded nine albums in total. She also works on other creative projects such as composing for theatre and ballet. She played the lead role in the first Macedonian musical Cija Si. She has collaborated with such artists as Sting.

FYR Macedonia in Eurovision

Appearances: 11
Debut: 1998
Victory: -
Best: 12th, - 2006: Ninanajna by Elena Risteska, with 56 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004-2007

Recent History

- 2011: Rusinka, by Vlatko Ilievski, 16th in the semi with 36 points
- 2010: Jas ja imam silata by Gjoko Taneski, 15th in the semi with 37 points
- 2009: Nešto što kje ostane by Next Time, 10th in the semi (jury voted out) with 45 points
- 2008: Let Me Love You by Tamara, Vračak and Adrian, 10th in semi (jury voted out) with 64 points

2012 National Final

On 19 November 2011, MKRTV announced its participation in the Eurovision Song Contest 2012 in Baku with the announcement of Kaliopi as the Macedonian entrant.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Arguments aside if Kaliopi is a returning contestant or not (in my book she is), I think this is year Macedonia can make it out of the semi-finals. The song is powerful, it tells a story that's recognisable even if you don't speak Macedonia, and 16 years after the pre-qualification knock-back, Kaliopi returns as someone who understands how to use the stage and interact with a live camera – that's vital. It'll be touch and go, but let's get Black and White to Saturday.

Samantha says...

Kaliopi tried to enter the ESC years ago, but was cruelly axed before she could take the stage. It's taken her nearly two decades to make it to the big show, but in that time, she's not only gained a larger fanbase through the region, but a deeper bank of experience that could serve her well in a Semi full of heavy-hitters. She's blending the "Balkan Diva" image with a fair amount of rock, and it really stands out. Assuming that she hits that whistle-tone $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way through, this might be a shock qualifier (Macedonia's first since 2007).

Sharleen says...

I don't usually let community sway me on my decisions, but now holding up the white flag to the neighbours and workmates who all have told me of the ultra-talented Kaliopi. I might not go so far as to say she will threaten to push Zeljko off the top Balkan spot, but the song and the artist has been a surprise package in the lineup. Differencing herself by giving the viewer a rock tinged ballad that you just know will go hard on the night, she will impress enough to get Macedonia out the semi and make a long awaited return to the final. Where she goes from there is anyone's guess.

Your Notes

Finland



FI 2012

At a Glance

Song: Nar Jag Blundar
Artist: Pernilla
Composer: Jonas Karlsson
Lyricist: Jonas Karlsson

About the Artist

Twenty-one-year-old Pernilla is a cheerful young lady, who won the Finnish Contest for New Music (UMK) in February 2012. Pernilla belongs to the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. "People have asked me whether I will sing in Swedish in Baku. Yes, I will. När Jag Blundar was written in Swedish. It would now be difficult for me to capture the emotional depth in another language.

Finland in Eurovision

Appearances: 45
Debut: 1961
Victory: 2006: Hard Rock Hallelujah by Lordi, with 292 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2006-2009

Recent History

- 2011: Da Da Dum by Paradise Oskar, 21st with 57 points
- 2010: Työlki ellää by Kuunkuiskaajat, 11th in the semi with 49 points
- 2009: Lose Control by Waldos People, 25th with 22 points (qualified from semi by jury vote)
- 2008: Missä miehet ratsastaa by Teräsbetoni, 22nd with 35 points

2012 National Final

YLE decided to change the format of their national selection, a new music contest. There were December jury selections, auditions and club gigs, semi finals in January and the big final in Helsinki in February. Six went through to the final, and then halved to 3 in a superfinal, which Pernilla finally won.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

An interesting choice from the new National Selection show brings a traditional Eurovision song from Finland. If I was being charitable. A lovely singer, a timeless song, but it's far from a classic, and not having Sweden in their semi-final has probably sealed Finland's fate.

Samantha says...

Beautiful, elegant, heartfelt, genuine, and subtle...all qualities for a great song, but does that list of compliments make for a good Eurovision entry? It's tough to say, especially considering that Finland and Sweden won't be in the same Semifinal this year. It might be too delicate to make an impact on voters expecting more bombast, but I think this is absolutely beautiful, and that Pernilla's mum should be exceptionally proud.

Sharleen says...

For the second year in a row, Finland have produced a 'nice' tune, performed capably but without personality. In comparison to Estonia, I feel the language choice of this tune is of detriment to its result. Without the Swedes voting in this semi, I struggle to think who would give it points.

Your Notes

France



At a Glance

Song: Echo (You and I)
Artist: Anggun
Composer: Jean Pierre Pilot & William Rousseau
Lyricist: William Rousseau & Anggun

About the Artist

Anggun is an international star who has sold over 2 million albums across Europe.

Anggun was already a star in South-East Asia before she decided to leave everything behind and launch an international career. She settled in Paris, where she met the producer who had made Céline Dion a success. Together they created the hit Snow on the Sahara, which charted in 33 countries around the world and made the top 5 in Europe and the US top 20.

Anggun is currently the world's most played French language singer, making her one of France's finest musical exports of the decade.

France in Eurovision

Appearances: 54
Debut: 1956
Victory: 1958: Dors mon Amour by Andre Cleaveau, with 27 points
1960: Tom Pillibi by Jacqueline Boyer, with 32 points
1962: Un Premier Amour by Isabelle Aubret, with 26 points
1969: Un Jour Un Enfant by Frida Boccara, with 18 points
1977: L'oiseau et l'enfant by Marie Myriam, with 136 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify (Big 5)

Recent History

- 2011: Sognu, by Amaury Vassili, 15th with 82 points
- 2010: Allez Ola Ole by Jessy Matador, 12th with 82 points
- 2009: Et s'il fallait le faire by Patricia Kaas, 8th with 107 points
- 2008: Divine by Sebastien Tellier, 18th with 47 points

2012 National Final

Both the artist and song were internally selected, with the artist announced on 29th November 2011.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

There are some songs that race through their three minutes of stage time and leave you wanting more. And then there's Echoes. It's a long three minutes, with a metronomic drive to the finish line that lacks an emotion core. It's a cold hard song, and I can't find any way in to love it.

Samantha says...

It took a few months, but now that we've heard Anggun singing this live, I have little doubt that this will impress on the night (assuming the staging is just as interesting as the Gaultier-clad-or-completely-shirtless video was, of course). It's got a tough draw, performing ninth, but both the singer and the song stand out.

Sharleen says...

France is pushing the boundary once again with its song selection, from last years opera to this years David Guetta-esque dance hit. Anggun is a highly polished and engaging performer on the stage who will do her best to sell it well, but the start of the song could be the key to whether people will continue to tune in. From slow guitar-riff and bass, to the tinny dance beat kicking in, it could be just that bit strange for viewers to understand and subsequently vote for. This would be a perfect summer anthem for the clubs of Ibiza, but most likely not one that will have the title of Eurovision winner attached to it.

Your Notes

Georgia



At a Glance

Song: I'm a Joker
Artist: Anri Jokhadze
Composer: Rusudan Chkhaidze
Lyricist: Bibi Kvachadze

About the Artist

Anri Jokhadze is the first male Georgian singer ever to represent the country in the Eurovision Song Contest. Jokhadze is a famous pop singer in his country. He was born in 1980 in Georgia and currently lives and works in Tbilisi. The 31-year-old artist is famous and loved by Georgian audiences for his powerful voice and his distinctive artistic talent.

Georgia in Eurovision

Appearances: 4
Debut: 2007
Victory: -
Best : 9th, 2011: One More Day by Eldrine, with 110 points
2010: Shine by Sopho Nizharadze, with 136 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011

Recent History

- 2011: One More Day, by Eldrine, 9th with 110 points
- 2010: Shine by Sopho Nizharadze, 9th with 136 points
- 2009: (withdrawn – We Don't Wanna Put In by Stefane & 3G)
- 2008: Peace Will Come by Diana Gurtskaya, 11th with 83 points

2012 National Final

Due to low interest, Georgia held a national final on 24th February with just 9 entries. Anri was declared the winner with 50% televote and 50% jury, although the points score was never announced.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

I like this. Not a lot, but I do like this. There is a time for music to be serious (err, when you're representing France), and there's a time you should just let yourself loose and see what happens. As Anri has. The key is going to be the stage performance, because it's going to be impossible to replicate the video on the Crystal stage. We'll know then if we're in for a car crash or not. I'm crossing my fingers for not.

Samantha says...

The problem here isn't about Anri's voice...that's more than capable, and his range is pretty epic. However, it sounds like the lyricist took an English rhyming dictionary and went nuts! He's a Joker, all right...I can't take this seriously.

Sharleen says...

There are a very small handful of songs this year that I reach for the control to skip, and none moreso than this. I know Anri is a consummate performer and he will heavily self-promote, stage well and sing well. His qualification will be down to that. But this is a song contest, and for me, the song is painful. The lyrics are childish, and the mix of styles is jarring. I don't care if it's been mixed twice by the producer behind 2 Junior Eurovision winners, no genius could polish this turd and turn it into a diamond.

Your Notes

Germany



DE 2012

At a Glance

Song: Standing Still
Artist: Roman Lob
Composer: Wayne Hector, Jamie Cullum, Steve Robson
Lyricist: Wayne Hector, Jamie Cullum, Steve Robson

About the Artist

Lob was born in Dusseldorf on July 2, 1990. Music has always played an important role in Lob's life, as he used to listen to his grandfather play the organ at the local church. He also sang in the choir of his kindergarten and later on learned to play the piano.

Since 2005, Lob has been a member of several bands playing the drums or singing lead vocals.

Germany in Eurovision

Appearances: 56
Debut: 1956
Victory: 2, 1982: Ein Bisschen Frieden by Nicole, with 161 points
2010: Satellite by Lena Meyer-Landrut, with 246 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify (Big 5)

Recent History

- 2011: Taken by a Stranger, by Lena Meyer-Landrut, 10th with 107 points
- 2010: Satellite by Lena Meyer-Landrut, 1st with 246 points
- 2009: Miss Kiss Kiss Bang by Alex Swings Oscar Sings, 20th with 35 points
- 2008: Disappear by No Angels, 23rd with 14 points

2021 National Final

Once again, the Unser Star Fur... show selection was used, and over 8 weeks from January, 20 acts were narrowed down to 2 acts – Roman and Ornella De Santis. Roman won with 50.7%.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

The Stefan Raab cookie cutter show uncovers another gem. It's inoffensive, with enough of a hook to keep you interested, very much like Brink from a few years ago that managed a credible result. And if it wins watch the UK claim writer Jamie Cullum as the real reason for the victory.

Samantha says...

It's tough to balance the "puppy-dog-eye" look with the "tattooed-motocross enthusiast" vibe, but Roman Lob's found the happy middle ground, much to the delight of cooing fans everywhere. The song, composed by a veteran group of songwriters, would likely be a great album track, but does it have enough "oomph" to get people to vote for it? It's got a great draw, and in the hands of a less-appealing singer, it might have turned into a bathroom break, but I wouldn't count "Standing Still" out of the left-hand side of the scoreboard.

Sharleen says...

What do you get when you put together a Jamie Cullum penned-tune, Stefan Raabs pop factory and a good looking but sensitive rock guy? Something that tries a little too hard to replicate the success of Lena, lacking the charm and emotion and catchiness of 'Satellite' or even 'Taken by a Stranger'. Whilst the tune is nice enough, it doesn't have a chorus that one can latch onto, it lacks a riff that sticks in my mind and makes me hum it beyond the performance. It's standing still in the results I'm afraid and not moving to a top result like its predecessor.

Your Notes

Greece



GR 2012

At a Glance

Song: Aphrodisiac
Artist: Eleftheria Eleftheriou
Composer: Dimitri Stassos, Mikaela Stenström, Dajana Lööf
Lyricist: Dimitri Stassos, Mikaela Stenström, Dajana Lööf

About the Artist

Eleftheriou was born in 1989 in Paralimni, Cyprus. Since childhood, she has had a great passion for music and has always dreamed of becoming a singer.

In her school years she studied piano, music theory and phonetic lessons. At the age of 16, she became a soloist in the national folk orchestra of RIK broadcasting corporation, in Cyprus. When she graduated high school, Eleftheriou commenced her Music and Performance Studies at the University of Surrey, London.

Eleftheriou earned her fame from participation in the talent show X-Factor 2 in 2010. Right after the contest, she collaborated with famous Greek singers Sakis Rouvas and Nikos Vertis. She toured internationally in Nikos Vertis performing across Europe and Australia.

In 2010 she released her first single Tables Are Turning, and in April 2011 recorded vocals for the huge hit single Housetwins, Never.

Greece in Eurovision

Appearances: 32
Debut: 1974
Victory: 2005: My Number One by Elena Paparizou, with 230 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004-2011

Recent History

- 2011: Watch My Dance, by Loucas Yiorkas feat. Stereo Mike, 7th with 120 points
- 2010: Opa by Giorgos Alkaios, 8th with 140 points
- 2009: This Is Our Night by Sakis, 7th with 120 points
- 2008: Secret Combination by Kalomira, 3rd with 218 points

2012 National Final

On 12 March 2011, as part of the selection process organized by ERT and Universal Music Greece, four competing acts—Cassiopeia, Dora, Eleftheria Eleftheriou, and Velvet Fire—performed their prospective entries during a televised event, with Eleftheria Eleftheriou and the song "Aphrodisiac" winning the chance to represent Greece at the Contest. The song was selected by a combination of public televoting and judge votes.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

On perhaps it's the entry from Universal Music? A perfectly serviceable entry from the Greeks, that makes all the right ethnic noises, the correct dance floor beats, and will have enough diaspora to take it through to Saturday night.. but no further.

Samantha says...

Fun, danceable, and undeniably Greek. We haven't heard Eleftheria Eleftheriou (the girl so nice, they named her twice!) sing this live quite yet (as the National Final was lip-synched), but let's be honest here. It's Greece. They've got Cyprus and Albania in the same Semi, and unlike the shocking knockouts for former "untouchables" Turkey and Armenia in 2011, "Aphrodisiac" is an entertaining three minutes of exactly what's worked for Greece in the past.

Sharleen says...

Greece brings us the hybrid of 2008s Secret Combination and 2005s My Number One. Catchy chorus, dance beats, ethnic elements, and a reasonably talented good looking girl. Who can blame them- why change a successful formula? Surprisingly live, Eletheria even delivers the goods better than the recording. Whilst it's not currently setting the fan world alight, my feeling is this is highly underrated; it will storm through to the finals, probably even win its semi. Take those points predicted for Cyprus by the fan clubs and pop them in here for a likely Top 10 final result.

Your Notes

Hungary



At a Glance

Song: Sound of our Hearts
Artist: Compact Disco
Composer: Benham Lotfi, Gabor Pal, Attila Sandor, Csaba Walko.
Lyricist: Benham Lotfi, Gabor Pal, Attila Sandor, Csaba Walko.

About the Artist

The four band members of Compact Disco have been performing and recording music together since 2005.

The band comprises Behnam Lotfi - one half of the techno producing team Collins & Behnam - and three former members of the funk-pop outfit Brownfield: vocalist Csaba Walkó, keyboard player Gábor Pál and bass player Attila Sándor.

In August 2008 the band started working on their first collaboration: the track Fly Or Dive. In July, their first album, Stereoid, was ready to launch. The video for the first track released off the album I'm In Love was hugely popular. It topped the Hungarian VIVA Club Chart and entered various international charts including the UK Buzz Chart and the Swiss DJ Chart.

The band released their second album, II, in May 2011, which significantly boosted their popularity. The single Feel the Rain received heavy airplay in all major radio stations. Compact Disco won the Best Local Act - Hungary prize at the MTV Europe Music Awards 2011 and received a nomination for the European selection of Worldwide Act.

Hungary in Eurovision

Appearances: 9
Debut: 1994
Victory: -
Best: 4th, 1994: Kinek mondjam el vétkeimet? by Frederika Bayer, with 122 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2005, 2007, 2011.

Recent History

- 2011: What About My Dreams by Kati Wolf, 22nd with 53 points
- 2010: -
- 2009: Dance With Me by Zoli Adak, 15th in semi with 16 points
- 2008: Candlelight by Csezy, 19th in semi with 6 points

2012 National Final

Hungary selected their entry through a national selection format titled "A Dal" (which means "The Song"), consisting of two semi-finals and a final, organised by the Hungarian broadcaster MTV. 20 artists over 2 semi finals selected 4 entries each for the final. Compact Disco came in the top 4 with televoting, and received the highest jury vote, thus being selected for Eurovision.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Bland, bland, bland bland. Bland? Bland bland! Bland blandy-bland-bland. Bland, bland bland. Bland, bland, bland bland. Bland? Bland bland! Bland blandy-bland-bland. Bland, bland bland. Bland.

Samantha says...

In studio, "Sound of Our Hearts" is a great song. Blending a bit of slower rock with a touch of electronica and the "message songs" that Eurovision often attracts, there is no other song in the Contest this year quite like this one. However, during the National Final, the lead singer's voice struggled a bit to reach the high notes in the chorus. Compact Disco is a well-established group who know how to work a venue, but in a tough Semi like they're in, it could go either way.

Sharleen says...

If this was based on song selection as played by radio, surely Compact Disco would stand a chance. A perfect MOR radio hit, a chill out song with a potent message. It oozes depth upon listening and on video, but unfortunately on the live stage, there seems that it doesn't live up to its full potential – it loses all passion. Sound of our Hearts won't beat beyond its 3 minutes for the public, but it may stand some slim hope with the juries for a narrow qualification.

Your Notes

Iceland



At a Glance

Song: Never Forget
Artist: Greta & Jónsi
Composer: Gréta Salóme
Lyricist: Gréta Salóme

About the Artist

Iceland are represented in Baku by Greta Salóme, a multi-talented singer/songwriter and Jónsi, who returns to the Eurovision stage eight years after representing his country in 2004 in Istanbul. They'll be singing Never Forget. Salóme was born in 1986 into a musical family. She began studying violin when she was four years old and has never looked back. Currently she's completing her master's degree at the Iceland Academy of Arts and is studying an advanced vocal technique called 'complete vocal'.

Salóme is a professional musician who has held a position as violinist in the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra. She regularly performs with classical and pop music ensembles, has made several radio and TV appearances and is also a studio musician.

Jónsi was born Jón Jósep Snaebjörnsson in 1977 in Akureyri, the biggest town in northern Iceland. He started singing at an early age and took part in a national college song contest before moving to Reykjavik.

In 1997, he joined the soul orientated pop group Í Svörtum Fötum, which started his singing and songwriting career. The band is currently touring Iceland. In 2004, Sveinn Runar Sigurdsson, the composer of Heaven, asked Jónsi to perform the song at the Eurovision Song Contest 2004 in Istanbul. Jónsi released a self-titled and critically acclaimed solo album in 2005. More recently, he has hosted the Icelandic version of Singing Bee.

Iceland in Eurovision

Appearances: 24
Debut: 1986
Victory: -
Best: 2nd, 1999: All Out of Luck by Selma, with 146 points
2009: Is It True? by Yohanna, with 218 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011.

Recent History

- 2011: Coming Home by Sjonnis Friends, 20th with 61 points
- 2010: Je Na Sai Quoi by Hera Bjork, 19th with 41 points
- 2009: Is It True? by Yohanna, 2nd with 218 points
- 2008: This Is My Life by Euroband, 14th with 64 points

2012 National Final

A total of 15 acts competed in Söngvakeppni 2012. Each semifinal featured five entries. Two of them went go through the final held on 11th February.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Look, I still have a soft spot for the Icelandic lyrics (mostly because it sounds like a gaelic fighting haku) but they've done a brilliant job in the jump to English. Theatrical, powerful, challenging, and a key change, Jonsi and Salome have everything going for them except a decent draw in the semi-finals. If it escapes running second, this could be the sleeper hit of Eurovision.

Samantha says...

Thundering, dramatic, and passionate, "Never Forget" is a personal favorite of mine this year. Greta Salome has had classical training, and it shows in the arrangement. It's often tough for me to like a translation as much as I like the original, but for the second year running, Iceland has found a good balance. And honestly...if you don't like the song, put it on mute, and you'll probably find something to like.

Sharleen says...

It's a rare treat when an artist moves from their own language to English and then actually makes it better. The lyrics for Never Forget are emotive and perfect, and any goosebumps I got from the national final have trebled with the release of the filmclip. The challenge for Jonsi is to make it out of the semi from 2nd position performance, but following Montenegro will add a special touch of class that should give it a nudge forward. Now my only hope is that the staging is just as perfect as I picture it to be. In that case, we may have a dark horse on our hands.

Your Notes

Ireland



At a Glance

Song: Waterline
Artist: Jedward
Composer: Daniel Priddy, Lars Halvor Jensen, Martin Michael Larsson
Lyricist: Daniel Priddy, Lars Halvor Jensen, Martin Michael Larsson

About the Artist

Jedward AKA brothers John and Edward Grimes are an Irish singing pop duo who became a huge hit after appearing on the UK's X-Factor in 2009. Following their success on the show Jedward collaborated with 90s hip-hop star Vanilla Ice on their debut single Under Pressure (Ice Ice Baby). It was a No.1 hit in the Irish singles charts and No.2 hit in the UK singles charts on downloads alone. The twins then went on to release their debut album Planet Jedward in July 2010 which became the fastest selling record in Ireland in 2010.

Their first solo tour was extended from 28 to 75 dates following phenomenal demand from fans. The twins have also had their own reality show OMG Jedward for Irish television which proved to be a huge hit with viewers and offered an entertaining insight into the world that is Planet Jedward.

Following their success at Eurovision last year they released their 2nd album and achieved chart success across Europe.

Ireland in Eurovision

Appearances: 45

Debut: 1965

Victory: 7, 1970: All Kinds of Everything by Dana, with 32 points
1980: Whats Another Year? by Johnny Logan, with 143 points
1987: Hold Me Now by Johnny Logan, with 172 points
1992: Why Me? by Linda Martin, with 155 points
1993: In Your Eyes by Niamh Kavanagh, with 187 points
1994: Rock n Roll Kids by Paul Harrington and Charlie McGettigan, with 226 points
1996: The Voice by Eimear Quinn, with 162 points

Best: 1st

Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2006, 2010, 2011

Recent History

- 2011: Lipstick by Jedward, 8th with 119 points
- 2010: It's For You by Niamh Kavanagh, 23rd with 25 points
- 2009: Et Cetera by Sinead Mulvey and Black Daisy, 11th in the semi with 52 points
- 2008: Irlande Douze Pointe by Dustin the Turkey, 15th in the semi with 22 points

2012 National Final

The national final was hosted on 9th February via The Late Late Show with 5 entrants. Jedward were the favourites, and won both the jury and televoting with 114 points to return to the contest.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

I'm not sure what to think here. Jedward need to at least appear to be a bit older, because the schtick that got them on every breakfast show last year won't work a second time (the reporters will ask Indiana Joan instead). It's a more Eurovisiony song than last year, but it's less Jedwardy. Running last makes it a likely qualifier, but it wouldn't be the first time Ireland are proud to send a turkey and hope the voters don't notice.

Samantha says...

"Waterline" has put me in a bit of a quandary. It's a better composition than "Lipstick", but it doesn't fit Jedward's hyperactive style quite as much. It's always a risk to come back, especially so soon after their 2011 breakout. Their fanbase in Europe has grown by leaps and bounds in the past year, but have ESC voters tired of them?

Sharleen says...

As I read the judgements and betting odds, I wonder whether people have maybe forgotten and overlooked the twins and their potential. This song is far more mature and lyrically better than last years' Lipstick, and thus shows a development in the talent behind the team. It might not be as instant, but these boys will bring everything to the stage to ensure it is memorable. The hard work is already done; they have rabid fans who will vote over and over again, they are now known Europe-wide. Discount them for a top 10 position at your peril.

Your Notes

Israel



At a Glance

Song: Time
Artist: Izabo
Composer: Ran Shem-Tov & Shiri Hadar
Lyricist: Ran Shem-Tov & Shiri Hadar

About the Artist

Izabo are best described as an action-packed combination of psychedelic rock, disco and punk, flavoured with Arabic spices. They secured a spot as one of Israel's most successful alternative pop bands with the 2003 release of their debut album *The Fun Makers*. From there, Izabo signed with Sony BMG and in the same year released *The Morning Hero* EP in the UK and began to take their funky sounds to an international audience. In January 2005, *The Fun Makers* was released in the Benelux countries via the label Rough Trade NL, and in 2006 released in France via Roymusic/ Discograph.

Since 2006, Izabo have been busy touring Europe and showcasing their catchy disco beats at a variety of festivals including Trans Musicales, The Paleo Festival and Eurosonic.

Their second album *Superlight* was released in Israel and France in 2008 to rave reviews. In October 2011, Izabo signed with the English Label 100% Records, who have signed such artists as Gossip, Moby and Placebo.

Israel in Eurovision

Appearances: 36
Debut: 1973
Victory: 3, 1978: A-Ba-Ni-Bi by Izhar Cohen and Alphabeta, with 157 points
1979: Hallelujah by Milk and Honey, with 125 points
1998: Diva by Dana International, with 172 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010

Recent History

- 2011: Ding Dong by Dana International, 15th with 38 points
- 2010: Milim by Harel Skaat, 14th with 71 points
- 2009: There Must Be Another Way by Noa & Mira Awad, 16th with 53 points
- 2008: The Fire In Your Eyes by Boáz Ma-aud, 9th with 124 points

2012 National Final

IBA planned a new national final with a live final to be held in January or February 2012, but this plan was cancelled in January 2012, because of schedule problems. On 7 February 2012, IBA announced its internally selected entry, which is "Time", by the band Izabo.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Eurovision at its most inventive, with a fantastically layered song, repeating motifs, constantly shifting tone and tempo, Time is a song that will always put a smile on my face and have me bouncing along with it. With just three minutes, that infectiousness will be vital. Expect Israel to perform far better than last year.

Samantha says...

If I had a convertible and access to a coastline, you can bet I'd be cruising around with this on full blast. It's quirky and bouncy, and, simply put, it makes me smile whenever I hear it. It doesn't have the best draw, numerically, but it follows a slow number from Finland and precedes San Marino, so it might have a chance to stand out.

Sharleen says...

I'm outing this as my personal favourite song of the 2012 contest. It appeals to my Britpop sensibilities, the same joyous mix of happy bouncy tune that Brainstorm brought to the contest in 2000 which gave me an all-time favourite. But putting that aside, do I think it will appeal as much to the public at large? That could very much depend on the staging. If they lose the clowns from the filmclip and focus on the band camaraderie, the strength that comes with years of live stage experience, this could just make it to the final.

Your Notes

Italy



IT 2012

At a Glance

Song: Out of Love
Artist: Nina Zilli
Composer: Christian Rabb, Kristoffer Sjökvist, Frida Molander & Charlie Mason
Lyricist: Nina Zilli, Christian Rabb, Kristoffer Sjökvist, Frida Molander & Charlie Mason.

About the Artist

Zilli debuted in Sanremo in 2010 with L'Uomo Che Amava Le Donne and won the 'Mia Martini' Critics' Award and the Press, Radio & TV Award as well as the Best Live Performance in the Newcomer's category.

Her debut album, Sempre Lontano, certified gold, was followed up by a guest performance at the 2011 Sanremo Festival. The new edition of the album has since gone platinum. After a sold-out tour, Zilli participated in the 2012 Sanremo Festival with the song Per Sempre and released a new studio album L'Amore È Femmina.

Italy in Eurovision

Appearances: 37
Debut: 1956
Victory: 2, 1964: Non ho l'età by Gigliola Cinquetti, with 49 points.
1990: Insieme: 1992 by Toto Cutugno, with 149 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: -

Recent History

- 2011: Madness of Love, by Raphael Gualazzi 2nd with 189 points

2012 National Final

Selection took place via the San Remo song festival in Italy on 18th February, with the jury making a special selection from the artists attending. Nina who came in 7th place was selected the Eurovision entry, however, later the song was changed from her San Remo entry Per Sempre to the title track of her album.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Is it in bad taste to say this is what Amy Winehouse could have managed if she had stayed clean? From the blaring horns that capture the viewer and demand they pay attention to the jangly opening, to the barely restrained chorus and lead vocals that pummel you to vote for here, it's no wonder Nina Zilli was chosen by the San Remo judges to sing at Eurovision. But are we ready for a four hour semi final and a six hour long Grand Contest from Milan with a tribute to Toto Cotugno as the interval act?

Samantha says...

For a country that skipped the ESC for so long, Italy certainly has gotten its sea legs back quickly...Nina Zilli brings a great retro-soul vibe to the Contest, and the song itself is sassy and memorable. The translation and transition between languages might be a bit clumsy at times, but I still think this has a great shot of major success in Baku.

Sharleen says...

Nina Zilli – powerhouse singer, great song that has seamlessly crossed from Italian to English, and the expectations for her performance at the final are high. I can see young and old alike digging this – its got that 60s vibe with that modern touch that took Amy Winehouse to the top of the charts. The juries should love it, and the public should love it. If Raphael can make it to second in 2011, I can only foresee Italy going one step further in 2012. If I had my way, this is our winner and I'll be seeing you in Milan next May.

Your Notes

Latvia



At a Glance

Song: Beautiful Song
Artist: Anmary
Composer: Ivars Makstnieks
Lyricist: Rolands Ūdris

About the Artist

Anmary was born in 1980 in the rural town of Gulbene and admits that music has been a part of her life since childhood. She started her stage career in the TV reality show The Talent Factory, where she earned the runner-up spot.

Anmary has taken part in a variety of musical projects, performing in the musical West Side Story, and was the lead vocalist for groups Sunny Sense and Mash Mash. Dr Christoph Schönherr, composer and professor at the Hamburg College of Music and Theatre, chose Anmary to sing his work Magnificat, which toured with the Hamburg Symphony Orchestra around Germany, Spain, France and Belgium.

Latvia in Eurovision

Appearances: 13
Debut: 2000
Victory: 2002: I Wanna by Marie N, with 176 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2005-2008

Recent History

- 2011: Angel in Disguise by Musiqq, 17th with 25 points
- 2010: What For? by Aisha, 17th in the semi with 11 points
- 2009: Probka by Intars Busulis, 19th in semi with 7 points
- 2008: Wolves of the Sea by Pirates of the Sea, 12th with 83 points

2012 National Final

Utilising the same format as previous years, 2 semis were held with 5 entries qualifying out of 10 in each semi via televote. The final 10 competed on 18th February, and a superfinal of 3 acts were announced. Anmary won narrowly over Mad Show Boys.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Why everyone complains about the “tacky” song from Latvia when every fan was pulling for the Mad Show Boys “Music Thief” to be the song I’m not sure. What I do know is that Anmary can manage this song live, she has the belief that it really is a beautiful song, and viewers across the continent could fall in love with this year’s viral earworm and hand Latvia a shock ticket to Saturday night.

Samantha says...

Like Georgia, the problem here isn’t the singer; it’s the song. While Anmary has a perfectly pleasant voice, the song is a joke entry that isn’t even funny. To me, the mark of a good Eurovision entry is if it can stand on its own two feet without the support of the Contest itself. “Beautiful Song” outside of the ESC context just doesn’t work, lyrically, and it’s vanilla, musically.

Sharleen says...

Latvia has lost its way in the contest over the past few years – starting off strong with Brainstorm and Marie N, they have produced more mediocre songs and off-kilter staged acts than any other country in the past decade. Now I feel they are grasping at straws, trying to appeal to the Western voters by name-dropping star names in the lyrics, and verging on novelty in the hope of capturing a spark their last qualifier Wolves of the Sea had. Any hope this has in making past the semi final will rely on how beautiful Anmary is, not the song itself.

Your Notes

Lithuania



At a Glance

Song: Love is Blind
Artist: Donny Montello
Composer: Brandon Stone
Lyricist: Brandon Stone & Jodie Rose

About the Artist

Montell was a successful participant in various TV shows. His voice mesmerised both the audience and jury in Duets of the Stars and he also won the Lithuanian version of Dancing with the Stars. He has competed at prestigious festivals, including Slavianskij Bazar and New Wave.

Lithuania in Eurovision

Appearances: 12
Debut: 1994
Victory: -
Best: 6th, 2006: We Are the Winners by LT United, with 162 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011

Recent History

- 2011: C'est Ma Vie, by Evelina Sassenko, 19th with 63 points
- 2010: East European Funk by InCulto, 12th in semi with 44 points
- 2009: Love by Sasha Son, 23rd with 23 points
- 2008: Nomads in the Night by Jeronimas Milius, 16th in semi with 30 points

2012 National Final

Starting on 1st February, 3 semis with a total of 36 acts competed. The final on 3rd March featured 14 entries and the 3 superfinalists were determined by 50% televote and 50% jury vote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Like Austria, Russia and Malta, Lithuania are finally sending a serial National Final loser to Baku with a song that is arguably weaker than their previous entry. But Donny Montell has a lot going for him, not least his looks and a promised stage performance that at least going to get a cheeky wink from every commentator around Europe. Not that he'll see them. I just wish he had decided to go with power ballad or disco, rather than trying to combine them both in his three minutes.

Samantha says...

Donny Montell has been trying so hard over the past few years to make it to Eurovision, and it shows. He threw everything but the kitchen sink into "Love is Blind", including a handful of key changes, gymnastics, and enough gimmicks to make Svetlana Loboda's eyes cross. He's got the coveted closing number in his Semifinal, and I have a feeling he'll want to close the evening with a bang...but will it be enough?

Sharleen says...

Donny Montell has always been the perfect package for Lithuania— he belongs on the stage with his versatile voice, cheeky smile and impressive dance moves. I even rate the concept of wearing a blindfold as a stunt that should set him apart from other acts have him remembered come voting time. Alas, the song lets him down – it's a bland mess of forgettable disco that I've come to expect from the likes of Malta, not Lithuania. I'm sure that, like me, Donny will be disappointed with the end result after years of trying to make it to the contest.

Your Notes

Malta



MT 2012

At a Glance

Song: This is the Night
Artist: Kurt Calleja
Composer: Johan Jämtberg, Mikael Gunnerås, Kurt Calleja
Lyricist: Johan Jämtberg, Mikael Gunnerås, Kurt Calleja

About the Artist

Twenty-two-year-old Calleja is from Hamrun and his favourite musical genres are pop, rock and semi-classical.

Calleja took his first singing audition when he was very young. He was selected to perform in the children's choir for his Holiness Pope John Paul II during last visit to Malta.

He started his professional singing career as a backing vocalist on a television variety show.

In 2010 Calleja performed in the national final of the Malta Song for Europe and won the Orfeo Festival in Venice, Italy.

Malta in Eurovision

Appearances: 24
Debut: 1971
Victory: -
Best: 2nd, 2002: 7th Wonder by Ira Losco, with 164 points
2005: Angel by Chiara, with 192 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009

Recent History

- 2011: One Life, by Glen Vella, 11th in semi with 54 points
- 2010: My Dream by Thea Garrett, 12th in semi with 45 points
- 2009: What If We by Chiara, 22nd with 31 points
- 2008: Vodka by Morena, 14th in semi with 38 points

2012 National Final

Over 3rd and 4th February 24 artists competed with a 66% jury vote and 33% televote. Of the first 24 artists only 16 qualified to the final and Kurt won over Claudio Faniello by 6 points.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Do not discount this song. Malta have had a poor record since the semi-finals were introduced, but got achingly close last year with Glen Vella. Kurt Calleja is a far more entertaining chap, with both a better song and more accessible stage presence. The His presentation has improved for the better since the marathon national final, and the Maltese delegation know exactly what to do to qualify for the Saturday night show without resorting to Chiara.

Samantha says...

Like Cyprus, this is another "Cotton Candy" entry. Sweet, fun, but without deeper substance. Malta's had a tough few years, only breaking into the Finals with popular returning acts. As entertaining as this is, though, it's running early in a tough Semifinal, stacking the deck against Kurt.

Sharleen says...

A far more accessible tune than last years offering from Glen Vella, Malta have stumbled upon an act that is bubbling with joy and should bring smiles to people Europe-wide. The song itself is not breaking any new ground musically, nor is it brilliant lyrically, but just like Kurts enthusiasm on stage, this song is proving infectious. Outside of the experiences they have had with the repeated choice of Chiara, this may just be a breakthrough to the final for Malta. And for the small island nation, that will bring pride enough.

Your Notes

Moldova



MD 2012

At a Glance

Song: Lautur
Artist: Pasha Parfeny
Composer: Pasha Parfeny, Alex Brashovean
Lyricist: Pasha Parfeny

About the Artist

Pasha Parfeny was born on May 30, 1986 in Moldova. Music has played an important role in his life since the age of seven, when he started studying classical piano. In 2002 he entered Tiraspol Music College where he gained experience as a vocalist. In 2006, Parfeny continued his musical studies at the State Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts where he trained as a composer.

Performing Lăutar at this year's Eurovision, Parfeny is also known as former vocalist of the band Sunstroke Project. In 2009 the band participated in the Moldovan Eurovision qualifying contest where they came third with the song No Crime. In late autumn 2010, Parfeny's contract expired and he left the band. In 2010, the singer participated in the Moldovan national selection with his song You Should Like and finished second.

Moldova in Eurovision

Appearances: 8
Debut: 2005
Victory: -
Best: 6th, 2005: Boonika Bate Doba by Zdob si Zdub, with 148 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011

Recent History

- 2011: So Lucky, by Zdob si Zdub, 12th with 97 points
- 2010: Run Away by Sunstroke Project and Olia Tira, 22nd with 27 points
- 2009: Hora Din Moldova by Nelly Ciobanu, 14th with 69 points
- 2008: A Century of Love by Geta Burlacu, 11th in semi with 36 points

2012 National Final

On 11th March a total of 21 acts completed at the national finals following a long jury and internet selection process in January. Results were determined by 50% televote and 50% jury vote. Pasha won with an overwhelming vote from both jury and televote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Sandwiched in-between the madness of Trackshittaz and the hype of Jedward, for once Moldova is going to look like the sensible song. Second last, with the contrast around him, could work out well for Pasha Parfeny, but on the other hand the song might simply get lost as viewers around Europe ask if they really saw a tractor on stage. It's nice and inofensive, with a charming performer, but it could easily be this year's late runner that falls.

Samantha says...

Pasha Parfeny, like Donny Montell or Kurt Calleja, is one of those acts who has been trying so hard over the past few years to make it to a Eurovision stage. "Lautar", like so many other Moldovan acts over the years, might not be the most musically deep entry, but it's an ethnically-flavored, bouncy romp that will just make you smile. This works well for the Moldovans, as they generally end up qualifying for the Saturday night. I wouldn't be shocked to see Pasha continue that trend.

Sharleen says...

Whilst Denmark brings the toe-tapper, Moldova gives us fun year after year. Overlook the wobbly English lyrics, Lautur has a memorable hook and Pasha exudes the perfect mix of professional and joyous. It won't be judged as a novelty tune in comparison to compatriots Zdob și Zdrub and thus miss out on some Western countries higher scores, but from its position at the semi final it should still gather quite a few votes for its cheeky chorus and charming performance from the televoting public. It's easy enough to write off as a potential top 10 threat, but expect Moldova to appear on Saturday night and feature in a respectable mid-table finish.

Your Notes

Montenegro



ME 2012

At a Glance

Song: Euro Neuro
Artist: Rambo Amadeus
Composer: Rambo Amadeus
Lyricist: Rambo Amadeus

About the Artist

Rambo Amadeus is a true cult figure of the ex-Yugoslav music scene. Amadeus often incorporates humour into his music. During his music career, Amadeus has succeeded in remaining distant from so-called “radio friendly” music, frequently using parody to express his beliefs. The self-titled World Mega Tzar is famous for its crazy, jazz-funk style and satire.

Amadeus’ name is linked to the creation “turbo folk”, a unique music phenomenon of the Balkan region.

Montenegro in Eurovision

Appearances: 4
Debut: 2007
Victory: -
Best: 11th in semi final
2009: Get Out of My Life, by Andrea Demirovic with 44 points in semi
Semi Finals: Never qualified

Recent History

- 2009: Get Out of My Life by Andrea Demirovic, 11th in semi with 44 points
- 2008: Zauvijek Volim Te by Stefan Filipovic, 14th in semi with 23 points
- 2007: Ajde Kroci by Stevan Faddy , 22nd in semi with 33 points

2012 National Final

An internal selection was made for the entry and artist, with Rambo Amadeus announced on 12th December.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

"As mad as a box of frogs", and probably the best opener for the Contest we could have. To be honest opening the show and grabbing attention is Rambo Amadeus' only hope of qualifying, but good on him for believing in his music and bringing something unique and memorable to the Song Contest. Such a pity the live Donkey isn't allowed on stage.

Samantha says...

You see, this is where the logical, rational, Eurovision pundit in me says "Sam, you know this has a snowball's chance in Hades's microwave of qualifying. You can't sing to it, he has no other Balkan voting block members in his Semi, and Montenegro has never qualified for a Final as an independent nation". The gleeful, impulsive, impish part of me, however, is giggling and bopping my head to this wonderful madcap insanity, and can't wait to see what the Montenegrin Zappa will do on stage in Baku. "Euro Neuro", indeed.

Sharleen says...

I'll be honest, this is another song that is giving me a headache in 2012. I get the jibes from Rambo, his tongue-firmly-in-cheek commentary to the current European situation, its just that it feels it tries too hard to be quirky and funny. It grates upon repeated listen, but I think we should be fortunate enough that we will only be hearing this once on the TV come competition time.

Your Notes

Norway



NO 2012

At a Glance

Song: Stay
Artist: Tooji
Composer: Tooji, Figge Boström & Peter Boström
Lyricist: Tooji, Figge Boström & Peter Boström

About the Artist

Iranian-Norwegian musician Tooji was born in Shiraz, Iran in 1988 to a close-knit family with a strong passion for music and the creative arts. His family's Persian traditions have strongly shaped Tooji's influences both individually and musically. His experience working in kindergartens with young people and asylum seekers has given him a more important mission in life - to give a voice to those who would otherwise not be heard.

Norway in Eurovision

Appearances: 50
Debut: 1960
Victory: 3, 1985: La Det Swinge by Bobbysocks, with 123 points
1995: Nocturne by Secret Garden, with 148 points
2009: Fairytale by Alexander Rybak, with 387 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010

Recent History

- 2011: Haba Haba, by Stella Mwangi, 17th in semi with 30 points
- 2010: My Heart is Yours by Didrik Solli-Tangen, 20th with 35 points
- 2009: Fairytale by Alexander Rybak, 1st with 387 points
- 2008: Hold On Be Strong by Maria Haukaas-Storeng, 5th with 182 points

2012 National Final

Melodi Grand Prix began on 15th January with 3 semis of 8 entries each. 3 acts qualified directly to the final with an additional act selected at the end as jury choice for the final. With a mix of jury and televoting, the final 10 were whittled down to 4 in a super-final. Tooji won with 60,000 more votes than second placed song Things Change.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

We all joke that this year's Contest is happening 93 miles from Iran, so Tooji (almost) has home advantage thanks to his heritage. Since Rybak, Norway have not had a successful Eurovision campaign. Tooji's song is high energy, typically Eurovision, and does it's best to stand out with a perfect breakdown and start again at the key change moment. It might be enough for a respectable enough, but not much more.

Samantha says...

An absolute stomper of a number, sure to get people on the dance floor. Tooji is a wonderfully charismatic showman, without coming across as overly smug, which is often a hard balance to find. I'm really looking forward to seeing the staging here, and how well he'll do with a live backing track (as opposed to the pre-recorded one that they used in MGP), but this has definite potential in my book!

Sharleen says...

The musical and appearance comparisons to last years offering from Eric Saade are much deserved. With little doubt, Tooji is aiming for a similar market that took Sweden to a top 3 position in 2011, but builds upon potential by 1. being more talented vocally, 2. the song being lyrically better, 3. incorporating ethnic elements in the arrangement and 4. not featuring a silly prop. And with that, he's sown up a hefty amount of points to sail through to Saturday. The Norwegian final saw him soar to the top when the betting odds were elsewhere, and depending on the staging in Baku has the potential to surprise once again.

Your Notes

Portugal



PT 2012

At a Glance

Song: Vida Minha
Artist: Filipa Sousa
Composer: Andrej Babic
Lyricist: Carlos Coelho

About the Artist

Twenty-seven-year-old Filipa Sousa has been experimenting with Portugal's traditional musical style fado since she was 16. As a fado singer, she's been invited to sing for the Portuguese communities abroad. Sousa was born in 1985 in Albufeira. Her musical aspirations started at the age of six, when she started learning music.

In 2003 she joined the fado group Al-Mouraria and performed in various parts of Portugal, Spain and Morocco. In 2007 she appeared on the casting show Operação Triunfo, on which she remained for seven weeks.

Portugal in Eurovision

Appearances: 45
Debut: 1964
Victory: -
Best: 6th, 1996: O meu coração não tem cor by Lucia Moniz, with 92 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2008-2010

Recent History

- 2011: Luta E Alegria, by Homes Da Luta, 18th in semi with 22 points
- 2010: Há dias assim by Filipa Azevedo, 18th with 43 points
- 2009: Todas as ruas do amor by Flor-de-lis, 15th with 57 points
- 2008: Senhora do mar (Negras águas) by Vania Fernandes, 13th with 69 points

2012 National Final

The final took place on 10th March with 12 entrants competing in a 50% mix of televoting and jury vote. Filipa Sousa won resoundingly with both 12 points from the jury and 12 from the televote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Oh Portugal... congratulations on sending something that is typically Portuguese, inoffensive, and as memorable as an episode of Seinfeld. Filipa is a lovely girl, and she's achieved her aim of singing at the Festival D Cancao, But you know that record of never finishing higher than sixth at Eurovision? It's going to comfortably remain intact...

Samantha says...

In some ways, I love the fact that the Portuguese stay so true to their cultural heritage in their ESC entries, both in terms of their language and their endemic musical styles. However, in this case, it might be more of a hindrance than a help. "Vida Minha" is well-sung and quite beautiful, but it lacks the punch and drama of recent efforts like "Senhora do Mar", which was written by the same songwriting team.

Sharleen says...

Year after year, Portugal for the most part churn out the same output to take to Eurovision. Clearly they are proud of their heritage, but the results seen on the scoreboard show that Europe does not necessarily share their love. This year they give us Filipa, who without a doubt has a wonderful voice, but the main element of drawing me into the emotion of what should be a passionate style of music is sorely lacking. This will get lost amongst the crowd, and I doubt its qualifying for the final.

Your Notes

Romania



At a Glance

Song: Zaleilah
Artist: Mandinga
Composer: Costi Ionita
Lyricist: Elena Ionescu, Dihigo Omar Secada, Costi Ionita

About the Artist

Mandinga consists of seven members: Elena (lead vocals), Alex (trumpet), Chupi (drums), El Niño (congas), Omar (piano), Zach (saxophone) and Tony (trombone).

The band started 10 years ago. Since then they have become known as the best Latino band in Romania. Mandinga have released four albums with band members working on a new album which will be released shortly. Mandinga's success has gone far beyond the borders of Romania as they are not afraid to create and launch new concepts for their shows.

The music of Mandinga combines Latino, Latin jazz, Balkan salsa and even club music. Any Mandinga appearance on stage turns into a spectacular show due to their blend of sounds, virtuosity and impeccable visual construction.

Romania in Eurovision

Appearances: 14
Debut: 1994
Victory: -
Best: 3rd, 2005: Let Me Try by Luminița Anghel & Sistem, with 158 points
2010: Playing with Fire by Paula Seling & Ovi, with 162 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004-2011

Recent History

- 2011: Change, by Hotel FM, 17th with 77 points
- 2010: Playing with Fire, by Paula Seling and Ovi, 3rd with 162 points.
- 2009: The Balkan Girls, by Elena Gheorghe, 19th with 40 points.
- 2008: Pe-o Margine de Lume, by Nico and Vlad, 20th with 45 points.

2012 National Final

Taking place on 10th March, 15 acts competed with 50% split jury and televoting. It was no surprise that number 1 single from Mandinga came 1st in the televote and 2nd in the jury, thus proceeding to Eurovision.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

If you want your dark horse for the year, here it is. A popular group in Romania, with a proven hit, bringing the girls and boys of summer to the Crystal Arena. It's uplifting, happy, and a polished ensemble on stage will look fantastic on televisions around the continent. Watch this one very carefully, especially if it's drawn in the last five for the Grand Final.

Samantha says...

Romania tends to be one of those countries that does fairly well no matter what they send. "Zaleilah" is a light, poppy summer hit that will go over brilliantly at the Euroclub, and might fill the square that France's "Allez! Ola! Olé!" did back in 2010. Plus, Romania has the benefit of having Moldova and Spain both voting in their Semifinal, which might give them a leg up on their competition. Assuming that they put on a fun and engaging stage show, I'd imagine we'll be seeing this in the Final, and with a strong draw, might be a contender for a single-digit position.

Sharleen says...

You want your proper Europe-wide summer party anthem spawned from Eurovision? Here it is. Its got it all – excellent female vocalist in a cat suit, bagpipes, drums, ethnic elements, a properly staged performance that is choreographed perfectly before they even hit Baku. And then there is the hands in the air, jump up and down chorus that will get everyone out of their seats in the stadium on the night. Stand by for both Western and Eastern Europe to embrace this with open arms. Particularly beware if it draws late amongst a bundle of ballads in the final. And whilst it probably won't get the 12s and 10s on Saturday, but a consistent 6-8 points instead, that's enough to see it threaten for the top spot.

Your Notes

Russia



RU 2012

At a Glance

Song: Party for Everybody
Artist: Buranovskiye Babushki
Composer: Viktor Drobysh, Timofei Leontiev
Lyricist: Olga Tuktareva, Marry S. Applegate

About the Artist

Buranovskiye Babushki ("Buranovo Grannies") are a folk group from the village of Buranovo in the Malopurginsky area of the Udmurt Republic, Russian Federation. The eldest member of the group is 76 years old.

Buranovskiye Babushki became known in 2008 through a news program on the television channel Russia. They have been covering Russian and Western pop songs by Aquarium, Kino, The Beatles, Queen and Shocking Blue. These covers were sung in Udmurt, citing folk music influences.

Buranovskiye Babushki came third in the Russian Eurovision qualifying contest in 2010. Between then and now they took part in a large number of television shows and concerts including a special performance at the open air festival Rock Above Volga. They performed on the same stage with Jose Carreras and Emir Kusturica, and toured through Estonia and France

Russia in Eurovision

Appearances: 15
Debut: 1994
Victory: 2008: Believe by Dima Bilan, with 272 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004-2011

Recent History

- 2011: Get You by Alexej Vorobjov, 16th with 77 points
- 2010: Lost and Forgotten by Peter Nalitch, 11th with 90 points
- 2009: Mamo by Anastasiya Prikhodko, 11th with 91 points
- 2008: Believe by Dima Bilan, 1st with 272 points

2012 National Final

Russia selected its entry at a national final on 11th March, featuring 25 artists. Dima Bilan, and ex-Tatu singer Yulia Volkova competed and expected to win, but were beaten by crowd favourites, the Grannies, winning 38.51% of the vote overall.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

We all wanted the Grannies to win through the National Final in 2010. Here they are, in 2012, with a weaker song. Sweden did the same thing with Eric Saade, after a disaster the previous year. After Alexey's 16th place last year, it looks like the Russian's are going for the Bjorkman playbook. So, third place for the Babushkis?

Samantha says...

On a personal level, I think that the Babushki's 2010 entry was a stronger song. But you can't deny that these women love what they do, and that this will be an entry like no other in Eurovision history. It's often so rare that countries highlight their true traditional styles at Eurovision...no matter how these ladies do on the scoreboard, they should be proud of what they're doing.

Sharleen says...

As a novelty, it's one of the best – a bunch of grannies singing a pop song to raise money to build themselves a church. Awww. We loved them back in 2010 at the Russian national final when they sang something more traditional, but clearly with a record company and marketing machine behind them, the naivety is gone, and the novelty is wearing thin. Televoting wise, its going to gather a few points, but I still can't believe that the juries will be sucked in so easily. The song is nothing special, and frankly, the talent is non-existent. It will be at the final, but I'm in no way expecting a top 10 result that the betting public seem to be tipping.

Your Notes

San Marino



At a Glance

Song: The Social Network Song
Artist: Valentina Monetta
Composer: Ralph Siegel
Lyricist: Timothy Touchton & José Santana Rodriguez

About the Artist

Monetta was first involved with the group Tiberio, where she got a taste of R&B, soul, funk and acid jazz. In 2002 she released the single Sharp in collaboration with Paul Manners Production.

In 2006, she joined the discography project, 2black, which released a very successful record with the singles Waves of Love (a remake of In Alto Mare by Loredana Berté) and VAI.

She has backed performers such as Silvie Vartan, Vanessa-J, DJ Master Frees, Bombos, El Ruben, Elena Cattaneo and Dance-House for musical productions, and the New York artist R Fame. She has also worked with Sammarinese band Blue Mobile.

San Marino in Eurovision

Appearances: 2
Debut: 2008
Victory: -
Best: 2011: Stand By by Senit, 16th in the semi with 34 points
Semi Finals: Have not qualified, only 3rd year competing

Recent History

- 2011: Stand By, by Senit, 16th in the semi with 34 points
- 2008: Complice by Miodio, 19th in the semi with 9 points

2012 National Final

On 16th March it was announced that the song and artist was internally selected. The Facebook song was first released on this date, however it had to be replaced following the EBU submission date as it was declared as having a commercial message.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

A courageous choice.

Samantha says...

It takes a lot for me to really dislike something. Being a diplomat at heart, I try to find the good in everything, but it's taking me a lot of effort to find something positive in this dated, creepy, borderline-copyright-infringing piece of "music". It's not funny or pointed enough to be satire, but it's not serious enough to be taken as a real song. I physically winced when I heard this...

Sharleen says...

I can only express one thought on this song – embarrassing. I feel embarrassed listening to it, I feel embarrassed that someone somewhere thought this is a reasonable enough song to put on a world stage to represent them, and terribly, I feel embarrassed that someone who clearly has the talent to do something so much better is willing to do this song. If it somehow gets through to the final (which I'm doubting), stay tuned for the whole of Eurovision to return to the clichéd kitsch-fest tag it's been trying hard to escape from. Null points.

Your Notes

Serbia



RS 2012

At a Glance

Song: Nije Ljubav Stvar
Artist: Zeljko Joksimovic
Composer: Zeljko Joksimovic
Lyricist: Marina Tucaković, Miloš Roganović

About the Artist

Joksimović was born in 1972 in Belgrade, Serbia. At age 12, he won the prestigious First Accordion of Europe award at the music festival in Paris. He attended the University of Musical Arts in Belgrade and can play 14 different instruments. The defining year in the career of Joksimović was 2004 when he won the national song contest for Serbia and Montenegro with the song Lane Moje, ultimately representing the country at Eurovision.

In December 2005 Joksimović's fourth album sold over 500,000 copies.

Serbia in Eurovision

Appearances: 5
Debut: 2007 (in 2004 as Serbia and Montenegro)
Victory: 2007: Molitva by Marija Serifovic, with 268 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011

Recent History

- 2011: Caroban by Nina, 14th with 84 points
- 2010: Ovo Je Balkan by Milan Stankovic, 13th with 72 points
- 2009: Cipela by Marko Kon and Milaan, 10th in semi (voted out by jury) with 60 points
- 2008: Oro by Jelena Tomasevic, 6th with 160 points

2012 National Final

An internal selection was made, and finally announced on 18th November that Zeljiko would once again represent Serbia at Eurovision.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It's another song with that leaves the big deliver and emotional moments to the last sixty seconds. Two minutes of build-up, and then it's over very quickly. Perhaps that's Zeljko's style at home, but on the Eurovision stage I think that's going to catch him out on Saturday night.

Samantha says...

Let's be honest here; this is "Lane Moje" 2.0, but that's really no reason to complain. You can't fault Zeljko for his singing or songwriting capabilities, and "Nije ljubav stvar" is well-performed and arranged. Dino Merlin opened his semi last year and had no trouble qualifying, so there's no reason why 2004's runner-up should fall at that hurdle. But for some reason, this song, while beautiful, lacks a certain "je ne sais quoi" that "Lane Moje" had, and while I expect it to meet with success, I can't imagine it taking the crown the night of the Final.

Sharleen says...

The king of the Balkan ballads is back! This time, he gives a tune that, whilst maybe not as instant as Lane Moje, still brings an uplifting, epic and classic element to the competition. Obviously, this is getting a bundle of points from its cultural neighbours, it's safely through to finals. What the Saturday result will rely upon will be its finals draw and how much other countries find it appealing. My thought – the opening minute of the performance captures elements of Coldplays' 'Paradise' which I feel could be latched onto by those outside the Balkans and will propel it up the finals board. I don't believe the long instrumental is a negative. For me, showman Zeljko is the safest top 5 bet for 2012.

Your Notes

Slovakia



SK 2012

At a Glance

Song: Don't Close Your Eyes
Artist: Max Jason Mai
Composer: Max Jason Mai
Lyricist: Max Jason Mai

About the Artist

Born on November 27, 1988 in Slovakia, Mai believes music can and should change the world. He loves people with a sense of humour and the good things in life. He reveres all living beings, he's a vegetarian and he doesn't wear clothes made from leather.

Mai is influenced by a wide range of artists of several genres, especially rock, including Led Zeppelin, Whitesnake, Alter Bridge, 30 Seconds To Mars, Dream Theater, Metallica, John Mayer, Enigma, Sade, Ennio Morricone and Antonin Dvorak. He recorded his Eurovision entry with the American record producer Michael "Elvis" Baskette.

Slovakia in Eurovision

Appearances: 6
Debut: 1994
Victory: -
Best: 18th, 1996: Kým nás máš by Marcel Palonder, with 19 points
Semi Finals: Have not qualified

Recent History

- 2011: I'm Still Alive by TWiiNS, 13th with 48 points
- 2010: Horehronie by Kristina, 16th in semi with 24 points
- 2009: Leť tmou by Kamil Mikulčík and Nela Pocisková, 18th with 8 points

2012 National Final

The artist and song was internally selected, debuting on 7th March.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

The Schlager fans will be screaming, hands in the air, and running for cover as Max takes to the stage with his machine gun guitars, staccato lyrics, and drum rolling choruses. The handful of rock fans watching Eurovision will think it's a bit middle of the road. Neither group are likely to vote or it.

Samantha says...

My heart breaks for Slovakia. The one year that they submit a song that I actually love, some geographical neighbors (Austria, Hungary) are drawn into the other semifinal and another (Poland) bows out altogether. I hope against hope that there's an audience for this fantastic (albeit a bit screamy at times) rock number, as there was for Eldrine last year and Teräsbetoni in 2008.

Sharleen says...

People are pointing to Finland 2006, Turkey 2010 and Georgia 2011 as examples of rock works at Eurovision and gets the big results for purely giving the audience something different to the countless ballads and pop songs. I don't believe it's as easy a judgement as that. Max indeed is unique to the 2012 lineup but that alone is not a reason it will qualify – I believe this song will not appeal beyond the audience it is purely aimed at. At worst, the screamy element of the song does little to attract more mainstream viewers, and sadly, may even push some over the edge to change the channel.

Your Notes

Slovenia



SI 2012

At a Glance

Song: Verjamem
Artist: Eva Boto
Composer: Vladimir Graič, Hari Mata Hari
Lyricist: Igor Pirkovič

About the Artist

Boto was born in 1995 and lives in the small town of Šentjanž pri Dravogradu, in the North Eastern part of Slovenia, 120km from the capital Ljubljana.

At age 10, Boto won an international singing competition in Austria. In later years, she performed several times at the FENS Youth Musical Festival, where she won twice. Boto was only 15 when she applied to audition for the Mission Eurovision contest. The national broadcaster RTVSLO produced this TV series, which started in late 2011 to select a singer to represent Slovenia at the Eurovision Song Contest.

Convincing renditions of songs by Mariah Carey, Shaina Twain, Irene Cara, Leona Lewis and Darja Švajger made a huge impression on the members of the jury and audiences alike. In the end, Boto won a by landslide number of votes.

Slovenia in Eurovision

Appearances: 18
Debut: 1993
Victory: -
Best: 7th, 1995: Priluhni mi by Darja Švajger, with 84 points
2001: Energy by Nuša Derenda, with 70 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2007, 2011

Recent History

- 2011: No One by Maja Keuc, 13th with 96 points
- 2010: Narodnozabavni rock by Ansambel Žlindra and Kalamari, 16th in semi with 6 points
- 2009: Love Symphony by Quartissimo, 16th in semi with 14 points
- 2008: Vrag naj vzame by Rebeka Dremelj, 11th with 36 points

2012 National Final

The show Misija Evrovizija (Mission Eurovision) was used from October 2011 to select two candidates, and then in later on 26th February, EMA 2012 an artist and the song was be chosen between the two candidates. Eva Boto with her selection won with more than twice the votes of the 2nd place.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

There is pedigree in the song-writing, with this team also behind “Molitva”, but no matter how nice her voice is, Eva Boto could be the weak link here. A number of moments in the song need an experienced diva to really sell the moment and light the emotional fires. Perhaps if Boto brought this song in five years time it would be a winning performance, right now we have a very unpolished diamond.

Samantha says...

This girl is only 16? Really? You can hear the “Molitva” pedigree in this, and I really like how they’ve kept it in the original Slovene (although this might be more of a boon in this Semifinal than if it had been in the First). It takes a while to build up its drama, but once it does, Eva’s voice remains powerful. This might be one of the strongest of the female-led power-ballads this year, but Slovenia traditionally finds itself on the periphery of the Ex-Yugoslav voting bloc. Let’s hope the glut of regional allies in this Semi

Sharleen says...

Returning in 2012 with another strong entry, Eva Boto is a 16-year old diva with a marvellous voice. Yes, she’s young and inexperienced, but the song is literally ‘Molitva’ mark 2 – both in quality and emotion. That counts for something. Whilst Eva didn’t impress on stage in the intimate theatre of Amsterdam, I return to her national final performance as the key. She blew me away with how much she engaged the camera. Stand by for a surprise qualification, ala Lithuania 2011, and the juries should be all over this to get her a mid-place result come the final.

Your Notes

Spain



ES 2012

At a Glance

Song: Quédate Conmigo (Stay With Me)
Artist: Pastora Soler
Composer: Antonio Sánchez, Thomas G:son & Erik Bernholm
Lyricist: Antonio Sánchez

About the Artist

Thirty-three-year-old Pastora Soler is a well-known Spanish singer, famous for combining diverse musical styles like copla, flamenco and "Canción Española" with pop. She is considered one of the best voices of the Spanish music scene. Soler was born in Seville in 1978. She started singing Spanish songs at the age of eight. She has been influenced by dance rhythms, fused music with Arab undertones, Brazilian samba, and made the best melodic music evolve. Her successful tours have taken her to Turkey, Egypt, Latin America and the USA.

With nine studio albums and a greatest hits record, Soler has gained three platinum certifications and four gold. Throughout her career, she has also received several awards. She has joined forces with such famous artists as Alejandro Sanz, Armando Manzanero, Raphael, Malú and Miguel Poveda.

Spain in Eurovision

Appearances: 51
Debut: 1961
Victory: 2nd, 1968: La La La by Massiel, with 29 points
1969: Vivo Cantando by Salome, with 18 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto qualify

Recent History

- 2011: Que Me Quiten Lo Bailao, 23rd with 50 points
- 2010: Algo pequeñito by Daniel Diges, 15th with 68 points
- 2009: La noche es para mí by Soraya, 24th with 23 points
- 2008: Baila el Chiki-chiki by Rodolfo Chikilicuatre, 16th with 55 points

2012 National Final

Pastora Soler sang three candidate songs in a televised national final that was held on 3 March 2012 at the Prado del Rey studios in Pozuelo de Alarcón, Community of Madrid. The candidate songs were chosen from her latest album "Una mujer como yo", released in October 2011, and from new songs submitted through her record company or by composers who usually work with her, rather than from an open call.

One of the three finalist songs was chosen through an Internet vote where two songs competed for a spot in the final. The online vote was held from 15 February to 20 February, and users were able to cast one single vote. The remaining two finalist songs were selected directly by Soler and her team. In the final, the winning song was selected by a combination of televoting (50%) and jury voting (50%).

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

A case of right singer, but wrong song. Yes there are some fabulous touches in this Spanish power ballad, but it all seems a bit shouty. And I can't get past how happy Soler looks performing a song that is easing her lover to stay with her. She's singing the song but is she conveying the emotion needed?

Samantha says...

Over the years, some of Spain's most memorable entries have been strong, dramatic ballads, many of which have become timeless classics in the Eurovision catalog. Pastora's returning Spain to that powerful tradition, without sounding dated or completely overwrought. Spain hasn't broken back into the Top Ten since 2004, but "Quédate conmigo" just might be the one to bring España back to a rightfully high position. She's a seasoned performer who knows who she is, and that might work to her advantage.

Sharleen says...

Soler leaves me as torn as her relationship in this song. You know she'll sing her heart out, the emotion will come through to tv with ease, the staging – if kept simple – should work in its favour. It is the best entry Spain has put forward in at least a decade. It feels like a winner, but at the same time, it feels like such an unsure bet. Going with my head rather than my heart, I think it may just miss the mark – despite the late draw, its preceded and followed with other slower tempo tunes, and could be swallowed up by bigger belting ballads on the night.

Your Notes

Sweden



At a Glance

Song: Euphoria
Artist: Loreen
Composer: Thomas G:son & Peter Boström
Lyricist: Thomas G:son & Peter Boström

About the Artist

Loreen was raised on the countryside outside Stockholm, to a family of Moroccan-Berber origin. She has a focused attitude to her music and gets frustrated when labelled as an R&B artist: "It's bizarre, I never listen to R&B or soul music!"

Loreen learned to play the piano by imitating Michael Nyman's score to the film *The Piano*.

Sweden in Eurovision

Appearances: 51
Debut: 1958
Victory: 4, 1974: Waterloo by ABBA, with 24 points
1984: Diggiloo Diggiley by The Herreys, with 145 points
1991: Fångad av en stormvind by Carola, with 146 points
1999: Take Me To Your Heaven by Charlotte Nilsson, with 163 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004-2009, 2011

Recent History

- 2011: Popular by Eric Saade, 3rd with 185 points
- 2010: This is my Life by Anna Bergendahl, 11th in the semi with 62 points
- 2009: La Voix by Malena Ernman, 21st with 33 points
- 2008: Hero by Charlotte Perrelli, 18th with 47 points

2012 National Final

Once again the massive Melodifestivalen took place from 4th February – 10th March, with 32 entries competing. 2 entries per semi of 4 directly qualified to final, and another 2 entries qualified to 2nd chance round where they went through sudden death rounds. The final 10 entries at the final competed via international juries and a percentile scored televote selection. Loreen won with a record score of 268 points.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Challenging choreography, a striking singer, and the first Texan (probably) to dance on the Eurovision stage. The fans have proclaimed this a winner already, and the record Melodifestivalen vote could point to a whitewash, but I'll simply point to Kati Wolf and Anna Bergendahl, while the fans point to Alexander Rybak. We won't know who's right till May 27th.

Samantha says...

Last year, Azerbaijan took a pretty standard song and turned the volume up to eleven on it through a brilliant staging. This year, I think Sweden is taking a relatively strong studio song and combining it with a staging unlike anything we've seen in Eurovision. By keeping the camera focused on Loreen at all times (as opposed to a backing band, other dancers, or random gimmicks), it gives "Euphoria" an intimate, modern feel that feels completely unique. Considering that the Swedes have the tendency to keep their Melodifestivalen staging pretty close to intact for Eurovision, we may have something truly standout on our hands in Baku. I hesitate to make predictions, but I wouldn't be shocked to see this equal Sweden's bronze-medal position from last year, or possibly surpass it.

Sharleen says...

Contrary to what many who know me think, I do think its song is modern, and has a real ear-worm quality that could make a success. But I just don't think that the Eurovision viewership as a whole is ready for such niche dance tune – I can't see it universally appealing as much as the runaway hit of Rybak that the fans are currently comparing it to. Relying so heavily on its choreography, how it is framed on stage and performed entirely live could kill its chances more than any other tune in the contest. With its success in Europe so far, I think it's safely out of the semi, but overall result, I steer towards the mid table and right-hand side of the board.

Your Notes

Switzerland



CH 2012

At a Glance

Song: Unbreakable
Artist: Sinplus
Composer: Gabriel Broggini, Ivan Broggini
Lyricist: Gabriel Broggini, Ivan Broggini

About the Artist

Sinplus consists of the two brothers Ivan and Gabriel Broggini. The brothers grew up listening to Queen, Bob Marley and U2, and began playing music at an early age.

When Gabriel left college, he decided to head to San Diego where he was able to sample the city's underground music scene. When he returned from America, the brothers decided to form a band and write songs together. With this vision in mind, they established the inFinity project. Their first single Without Identity made it to the charts.

Under new band name Sinplus the brothers recorded the EP Get Control, produced in Zurich and featuring a single 1984. The single was aired on various Swiss and Italian radio stations and the video clip was broadcast in both countries. Meanwhile, the brothers wrote Shoot, a track that became one of the official anthems of the 2009 World Hockey Championships.

Switzerland in Eurovision

Appearances: 52
Debut: 1956
Victory: 2, 1956: Refrain, by Lys Assia, (the EBU lost the scoreboard)
1988: Ne partez pas sans moi, by Celine Dion, with 137 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified 2005, 2006, 2011

Recent History

- 2011: In Love for a While, by Anna Rossinelli, 25th with 9 points
- 2010: Il Pleut De L'Or, by Michael von der Heide, 17th in the semi with 2 points.
- 2009: The Highest Heights, by Lovebugs. 14th in the semi with 15 points.
- 2008: Era Stupendo, by Paolo Meneguzzi. 13th in the semi with 47 points.

2012 National Final

Held on 10 December 2010, and was thus the first national artist/song combination to be chosen for the 2011 Song Contest. 14 songs were performed in one live show, including that of 1956 winner Lys Assia. Judges passed comment, but voting was 100% public. Sinplus won with almost 18% of the vote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

A revelation of a foot tapper when I heard it at the Swiss national Final, Sinplus know how to work a live crowd and get them to enjoy the song, even if they are schlager fans. It's borderline qualification, but their energy might be enough to push the Swiss to a second Saturday Final in a row. I'm still convinced it's Pick from Glee on the guitar though.

Samantha says...

It feels catchy and familiar, and yet it stands out immediately. Sinplus's entry blends accessible rock with a simple hook and a positive message that Eurovision audiences often go for, but there is something lacking in this that I can't quite put my finger on. All in all, I generally enjoy this one, just as I enjoyed "The Highest Heights" from 2009, but we all know how the Lovebugs fared...

Sharleen says...

The entry from Sinplus is reminiscent of an on-form The Killers song. Except without the English language skills. Nonetheless the hook in the chorus is at least easily remembered, and should have those so inclined up singing and screaming along too. But in the end, you are left with no memory of what you just witnessed, it feels all a bit play by numbers. For a true indication of how this will truly fare, I look to Switzerland's last rock-indie track 'The Highest Heights' from 2009 – likewise, it's not a qualifier.

Your Notes

The Netherlands



NL 2012

At a Glance

Song: You and Me
Artist: Joan Franka
Composer: Joan Franka, Jessica Hoogenboom
Lyricist: Joan Franka

About the Artist

As a gifted singer/songwriter and a talented poet, Franka has a story to tell through her song.

Franka was born in Rotterdam in 1990 to a Dutch mother and a Turkish father. Joan has always been passionate about music. That's why, at age six, she knew she wanted to pursue a career in music: "I didn't even know if I could sing. I just thought: I want it and I'm going to do it."

In 2010 Joan was scouted to take part in The Voice of Holland. During the programme, producer Holger Schwedt promised to record an album with her. Holger submitted the song, You and Me for the National Song Festival in 2012. She beat the five other contestants. You and Me tells the story of a childhood memory, in which she often played cowboys and Indians with her first boyfriend.

The Netherlands in Eurovision

Appearances: 52
Debut: 1956
Victory: 4, 1957: Net als toen by Corry Brokken, with 31 points
1959: Een beetje by Teddy Scholten, with 21 points
1969: De Troubadour by Lenny Kuhr, with 18 points
1975: Ding-A-Dong by Teach-In, with 152 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004

Recent History

- 2011: Never Alone by 3JS, 19th with 13 points
- 2010: Ik ben verliefd (Sha-la-lie) by Sieneke, 14th in semi with 29 points
- 2009: Shine by De Toppers, 17th in semi with 11 points
- 2008: Your Heart Belongs To Me by Hind, 13th in semi with 27 points

2012 National Final

On 5 January 2012, TROS announced the six finalists for the selection. The final consisted of three duels with two candidates competing in each. The three duels were determined by a draw on 19 February 2012. The three winners of these duels got into a super-final that selected the overall winner. The decisions were made by a professional jury (50%) and public televoting (50%).

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

If this song had been sent by one of the Scandic countries, we'd be discussing it as the potential winner of the whole Song Contest. Alas cultural voting is going to make Joan Franka's task almost impossible. Almost. There's part of me that is wishing really hard for this to sneak out the semi finals, draw the closing spot for Saturday, and then we all head to Amsterdam in 2013. Can you make that happen, Mr Sand?

Samantha says...

"You and Me" is this year's "iPod Ad" song. Sweet, charming, quirky, completely inoffensive. This song sounds like it could have been written by Joni Mitchell 35 years ago, yet it still sounds fresh. The headdress Joan wore in the National Finals may have been a bit overkill (even though it does fit into the imagery of the song), but I think this is the best Dutch song Eurovision's had in quite a while.

Sharleen says...

On the plus-side, 'You and Me' is a total ear-worm – after a first listen I was easily able to recall the opening lines and hum the chorus. On the bad side, I was able to do the same with 'Sha-la-lie' back in 2010. And like Sienekes entry, this has somehow gathered a following that proclaim it could strangely win yet in the same breath say that its ridiculous. Maybe I'm looking too deep, but on the surface, it's a sinker for me.

Your Notes

Turkey



At a Glance

Song: Love Me Back
Artist: Can Bonomo
Composer: Can Bonomo
Lyricist: Can Bonomo

About the Artist

Bonomo started playing guitar at the age of eight, and performed with amateur bands in Izmir and Istanbul during his high school and university years. After working in the radio industry, Bonomo moved into television and produced shows at Number One TV and MTV. In January 2011, Bonomo released his first album, Meczip.

Bonomo's music changed dimension when he completed his demo CD and sent it to Can Saban, who would later become the producer, arranger, music and video director of Meczip. Bonomo and Saban, have continuing their partnership and are now the founding partners of the company Can Biraderler.

Turkey in Eurovision

Appearances: 33
Debut: 1975
Victory: 1, 2003: Everyway That I Can by Sertab Erener, with 167 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004-2010

Recent History

- 2011: Live It Up by Yuksek Sadakat, 13th with 47 points
- 2010: We Could Be The Same by Manga, 2nd with 170 points
- 2009: Dum Tek Tek by Hadise, 4th with 177 points
- 2008: Deli by Mor ve Otesi, 7th with 138 points

2012 National Final

Both the artist and song were selected internally. The artist announcement was made on 9 January, with the song presentation taking place on 22 February.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It's a return to 'form' for Turkey, with a cookie cutter pop number infused with ethnic rhythms, and after last year's lethargic live performance from Yuksek Sadakat, the cheeky smile is a wonderful and welcome contrast. Perhaps it gets a bit too predictable in the last third of the song, because it seems to struggle to fill the three minutes.

Samantha says...

The song holds on to some of the ethnic roots that we've often heard from Turkey in the past, without making it seem too much like a cliched "hip-shaker". Can's more than a little charming, too! It might not be my absolute favorite Turkish entry of all time (that honor still goes to the trinity of "Dinle", "Deli", and "We Could Be the Same"), but I can almost guarantee that I'll be bouncing around the Press Centre in Baku, singing "Hey, nonny-nonny-nonny..."

Sharleen says...

After the failure of last years repeated rock noise from Turkey, they are looking for a return to form with a return to ethnic tinged music. The performance from Can seemingly tries a little too hard to pigeonhole his indie stylings into a 'Eurovision type' song. Furthermore, the 'hey nonny nonny' and promised staging points more towards theatre, than potential hit and winner. If it clears the semi, it will only be setting sail southbound on the finals board.

Your Notes

Ukraine



UA 2012

At a Glance

Song: Be My Guest
Artist: Gaitana
Composer: Gaitana and KIWI Project
Lyricist: Gaitana

About the Artist

Gaitana is a Ukrainian singer and composer who has recorded and released five albums and over 20 music videos over her 10-year career. She has received several awards, including the Ukrainian Music Award for the "Best Female Singer of the Year" and the face of Francophonie Festival 2010.

Recently, Gaitana became the "Official Friend of UEFA Euro 2012" and started working on a series of creative sports and social projects. She also wrote the song You Are The Champion for the Klitschko Brothers Foundation as an "anthem of a social project for orphaned children". In the future she plans to release a new album, produced by Narada Michael Walden, Eric Daniels, Rob Hoffman and Robert Damper and recorded in the US.

Ukraine in Eurovision

Appearances: 9
Debut: 2003
Victory: 2004 Wild Dances by Ruslana, with 280 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004-2010

Recent History

- 2011: Angel by Mika Newton, 4th with 159 points
- 2010: Sweet People by Alyosha, 10th with 108 points
- 2009: Be My Valentine (Anti-Crisis Girl) by Svetlana Loboda, 12th with 76 points
- 2008: Shady Lady by Ani Lorak, 2nd with 230 points

2012 National Final

The national final was held on 18 February, with 21 entries taking part. Public favourite Max Barskih came 2nd, however Gaitana won with 3 more points.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Ukraine have two handy skills at Eurovision. The first is the ability to rack up points thanks to a mix of diaspora and cultural ties with the former soviet states (no I'm not calling it political voting!). That's enough to get them out of the embarrassing results on the right hand side of the table. But it's the second skill that always delights me, and that's the ability to find a little something special in a song come Eurovision. Ayosha's Sweet People became a powerhouse when it reached Oslo, Mika Newton's sand enhanced performance found another gear in Düsseldorf, and with the already bouncy Gaitana bringing a high-energy disco number, expect this song to bat well above it's weight in the Crystal Arena.

Samantha says...

This is a true return to the madcap entries that we've come to expect from Ukraine. Much like "Wild Dances" and "Be My Valentine", "Be My Guest" has the potential for some major on-stage fireworks, both literally and figuratively. Gaytana can belt, and she brings a warmth to the stage that really fits the welcoming message of the song. I wouldn't be surprised to see this extend the country's streak of strong placements.

Sharleen says...

Its very hard to ever discount the potential of any Ukrainian entry; and Gaitana out of the acts of the past 3 years feels like it has the most instant appeal and chance of succeeding. Its catchy, it's a welcoming happy song, and it will capture a moment and mood across Europe if the delegation have an intention of matching it with its Euro 2012 campaign that 'Be My Guest' represents. Where it could fall down is if they overstage. Over-the-top like Svetlana Loboda in 2009? It will be mid to right hand side come the final. Understated like Alyosha in 2010 though? Watch for a top 10 finish.

Your Notes

United Kingdom



UK 2012

At a Glance

Song: Love Will Set You Free
Artist: Engelbert Humperdinck
Compose & Lyrics:
Martin Terefe & Sacha Skarbek

About the Artist

Engelbert Humperdinck, performing Love Will Set You Free at this year's Eurovision, has been a big name in the international music industry for over 45 years, with over 150 million records sold worldwide. Humperdinck has had four Grammy nominations, a Golden Globe for Entertainer of the Year, 63 gold and 24 platinum records and as one of only a handful of artists with a star on both the Hollywood Walk of Fame and the Las Vegas Walk of Fame. Humperdinck still has a loyal global fan base, and in the past 12 months alone has performed all over Europe including in the United Kingdom, Russia, Romania, The Netherlands, Belgium and Israel.

During his heyday in the late '60s and early '70s, Humperdinck cultivated the image of a mysterious heartthrob. Few people realise that it was Humperdinck, not Elvis, who made famous the sideburns and leather jumpsuits. Humperdinck often jokingly asserts that Elvis "stole" the image from him. He has been especially popular in Europe and his native UK with many of his singles reaching the top 10 in charts in countries such as Germany, The Netherlands and Norway. Humperdinck is currently in the studio recording a brand new album with Grammy award-winning producer Martin Terefe and writer Dan Wilson with some surprising contemporary collaborations.

United Kingdom in Eurovision

Appearances: 54
Debut: 1957
Victory: 5, 1967: Puppet on a String by Sandie Shaw, with 47 points
Boom Bang a Bang by Lulu, with 18 points
Save Your Kisses For Me by Brotherhood of Man, with 164 points
Making Your Mind Up by Bucks Fizz, with 136 points
Love Shine a Light by Katrina and The Waves, with 227 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify

Recent History

- 2011: I Can by Blue, 11th with 100 points
- 2010: That Sounds Good To Me by Josh Dubovie, 25th with 10 points
- 2009: Its My Time by Jade Ewen, 5th with 173 points
- 2008: Even If by Andy Abrahams, 25th with 14 points

2012 National Final

On 1st March it was announced that both the artist and song had been internally selected for the UK for the second time in its history at the contest. The song debuted on 19th March.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

A waltz will not win the Eurovision Song Contest whilst I cover the Contest, even if it's not drawn first in the running order. But fair play to the BBC for somehow finding a respectable singer, with a wonderful stage presence, to fly the flag in Baku. Opening the show is the opposite end of the bill that Engelbert Humperdinck is used to, and he'll struggle to get on the left hand side of the table, but thankfully it's no Gemini. Although I still can't help hearing "Rainbow Connection" in the chorus though...

Samantha says...

The first time that I heard this, the word that came to mind is "respect". You've got to respect a man who's been performing almost nonstop since the 1950s, and can still belt out a beautiful number like this. You've got to respect the BBC for taking what has been seen as a "risk" by selecting a performer like The Hump. You've got to respect the songwriters for coming up with a lovely song that fits the performing style of a man in his mid-70s, yet doesn't sound completely stale. Engelbert's got a rough draw, and it's really not a typical Eurovision song...but you've got to tip your hat to the man.

Sharleen says...

If all the UK wants is to educate its public that Eurovision is a serious contest and look respectable, it's a winner. But if the powers that be feel that this could threaten for top spot, it's well off the mark. My dad loves this song, and therein lies part of the problem. Humperdinck is a huge name, but beyond the generation that bought his songs in the 60s and 70s, I'm not convinced it will connect with the televoters.

Your Notes